IS NUMBER CONTAINS ELEVEN SHORT STORIES

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 497. FOR WEEK ENDING JULY 9TH, 1898. [ONE PENNY.

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SHORT STORIES

TALES OF LOVE WIT PATHOS HUMOUR STRATEGY ETC.

No. 497.] [One Penny.

For the Week ending July 9th, 1898.

Edited by Arthur Pearson

A SCARE-CROW ROMANCE.

Leslie Forrest went to bed a peaceful citizen and awoke a rebellious farmer. At first he knew nothing at all of the germ of war that slumbered under the ample folds of his yellow pyjamas. He lay in his bed reflecting, a letter in his hand, and his knees up-heaving the coverlet.

"Your Uncle James is dead and you are the heir to the Black Oaks farm," was all he had read of the letter. Visions of meadow and stream; of hillside cool beneath majestic trees; the grey of a lichen-covered wall, overgrown with brambles; the spacious house, outstretching arms of hospitality; and the curving path that skirted the ancient well on its way to the veteran gate, that never shut, came o'er his mind from long ago.

This mood was merely reminiscent, however, and not at all to be construed as a consent to become the owner of a farm.

"On the whole," he ruminated, scratching the top of his head, "the place is worth having, if only for a home—a sort of retreat; and then, if ever I should get married, well, let's see what the rest of it says."

He resumed his letter: "heir to the Black Oaks farm, including the Hilltop addition and a legacy of £5,000,

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providing you marry Abigail Matilda Smithers, a distant family connection. In the event of your refusal to wed the said lady, you to inherit the Black Oaks and she to have the Hilltop addition and legacy."

"Now, bother Abigail Smithereens!" ejaculated Forrest, bounding out of bed and sweeping away the coverlet, blankets and sheets. "It's perfectly idiotic. It's the kind of stuff and nonsense you read about. No, you don't, Uncle Jeems. She can have the Hilltop addition, and now, why on earth did he give her the whole of the cash? Five thou—I think I'd like—but, no, not with Abigail—no, Abby, go thy Smithers' ways, in peace and curl papers."

He danced the prelude of a marvellous serpentine gyration and sat down on the edge of the bed to think the matter over again. The rebellion was started and working well.

"Heigho," he mused, as with hands on his knees he looked with winkless eyes at the common design on the carpet. "It's just the luck—it always goes about that way; and just as a fellow is actually taking an interest in the loveliest girl in the universe, and begins to think he would like to settle down."

Here he grew as sentimental and retrospective as is possible to any man in pyjamas.

"Wasn't she charming!" he exclaimed in delight. "Such dear brown eyes! Such hair—it looked like—what?—like raven-coloured skeins of silk. Such colour, spirit and genius of expressing herself! And yet a touch of sadness, too. I wonder why she wouldn't dance—she said she liked it; well, perhaps we made better progress at getting acquainted as it was."

He was silent a moment.

"Miss Rockland—rather fine—I wonder what her first name is? And I don't know where she lives or anything about her—that's the trouble with a formal introduction at a seaside ball."

Slowly dressing himself in conventional attire, and fluctuating between rhapsodies on his unknown queen, and railing at Abigail, Forrest went off to his breakfast at last.

"I'll look the place over for a couple of weeks, and then I am going to hunt Miss Rockland up, or squander my youth and fortune in the effort," said he.

Three big crows were stalking about and cawing in a field that belonged to the Hilltop addition one morning, as Forrest came out of his farmhouse. He saw them out of the corners of his eyes, in the same way that he saw the woman who walked about the place from time to time. That Abigail would come to fetch him away, or that he might inadvertently wander down through the meadows into her possessions and there be trapped and wed in spite of himself, was a constant fear with Forrest.

Abigail, he reflected, looked aggressive, progressive, and acquisitive. She walked about her acres on the opposite hill with a certain surefootedness that was very suggestive, he thought.

On her head she wore a bonnet that looked like a piece of blue stove-pipe, and hid her face as if it were deep in a tunnel and peering forth. This and the calico dress, secured at the waist loosely, were exactly the "earmarks" of an Abigail, the young man said.

As he glanced at the crows this particular morning, he saw her come and frighten them away. They alighted in his field of oats.

"Tut, tut, Abby," he exclaimed, "I hanker not for crow!"

When she turned away, he went to the hill and shied a stone at the birds.

They settled again on the Hilltop property, whence, in half-an-hour, Abigail "shooed" them again to the field of her neighbour.

"Confound her impudence!" said Forrest. "I don't care now if she does see me, I am going right down to scare her saucy black scoundrels."

She was standing in her field with a very determined air.

"No, I don't care if she does see me," he repeated.

But perhaps he did; at least in that particular garb, for he donned a ragged coat, and a crumpled hat before he proceeded along the hill.

"Perhaps she won't be so anxious to get me if she thinks I'm a yokel," he mused.

But why should the spirit of Forrest be proud? The woman across the way was so very far from wanting to get him as to even avoid her own fields if she thought he was walking about in his. She trembled daily lest he come to her door or cross the meadows to pour a five-thousand-pound tale of love and adoration into her startled ears.

She had long before concluded, with every indication of logic, that she hated this person, suggested as he was in the will of her ancient distant relation, Uncle Jim, as a suitable future husband. And now to add further insult to the injury caused by his presence on the opposite farm, he drove his wretched crows into every field she had. This particular morning found her red, angry and determined; hence her obstinate stand against the birds.

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"Oh, ho, my Abby," chuckled Forrest, "you undertake to make a scare-crow of yourself, I see. Well, my doting Smithereens, I should very much enjoy removing my hat in acknowledgement of your eminent fitness—only I fear you'd think me proposing. But if you can be a scare-woman, I can be a scare-man, which same kindly remember."

He planted himself on the slope and the crows went off in dismay.

Thus stood the two, distantly glaring at each other, and telephoning messages of hatred along the filmy lines of web that spiders had stretched between.

"This will never do," mused Forrest. "I'll fetch a proxy; that'll make her wild."

Forthwith he proceeded to build a regulation scare-crow of masculine mien, that flapped its sleeves in the wind in a vacuous ecstasy.

Was Abigail disconcerted? No, not she. She caused to be erected a female scare-crow on the hill that was hers, with a bonnet on its head and a string about its slender unbending waist. It, too, waved its armless sleeves.

Now was a strange duet enacted, that was wrought by the breeze that wafted over the meadows and about the hills. Toying with the scare-crows from behind, the wind would lift the sleeves, first of the scare-woman, next of the man, and extend them towards each other, on the hills, in a shocking and palpable invitation to "come." If the breeze were strong it would lean the scare-man forward and nod his head in gallantry, and then go round and bend the woman sweetly and move her bonnet most coquettishly.

To say that the owners of the figures were indignant would be utterly inadequate; they were perfectly mad about it. They were also ashamed to pull the wooing figures down, for that would be, indeed, a confession that the spooning antics had been noticed.

At the end of the week the wind had loosened the joints of the scare-crows to such an extent that their frantic efforts to embrace across the intervening space were nearly equalled by their shameless bowing and scraping from morning till night.

Abigail meditated flight; Forrest thought of suicide and of slipping across in the night to inflict personal violence on the scare-woman with an axe.

"As soon as the hay is in," he muttered, "I'll get away from this and go to look for Miss Rockland."

Early one morning, while the various preliminaries of a thunderstorm were being completed, young Boreas, the blustering brother of Zephyr, came tearing along as a whirlwind that scudded hither and thither and up the hills and down. When he had gone, the landscape was utterly innocent of scare people, hats, bonnets and all.

Forrest was late upon the scene.

"Thank goodness," he said aloud, "the storm has pulled her scarecrow out by the roots." Then he added, as he took in the lay of the country: "Hallo! the confounded wind has levelled that Beau Brummel of mine."

He walked to the place where the Beau had flourished, and found a hole in the ground, wherein the leg of the scare-man once had been. From this a mark, as of something dragged across the dampened soil, indicated that the man of rags rested below in the hollow.

Down went Forrest. Coming at last to a little clearing, he leapt the brook—to find himself face to face with Abigail, who likewise sought her departed "crow."

"What! you!—Miss Rockland!" he cried.

"What! you! Mr. Leslie!" said she.

They stood a moment dumfounded.

"My name is Leslie Forrest," then said he, his face aglow with pleasant emotions.

"Oh! and mine is Abigail Matilda Rockland Smithers—but I—I sometimes leave out part of it," she said; and a merry twinkle began in her eyes and went all over her witching countenance.

Glancing towards the brook, in embarrassment perhaps, the two young people suddenly discovered the scare-man and the scare-woman, standing against the trees, an armless sleeve of the Beau flabbily wrapped about the lady's waist and her bonnet drooping coyly.

* * *

On the cards was written, "Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Forrest and Mr. and Mrs. Scare-crow, at home, Black Oaks, September 10th, 1897."

H. T. P.

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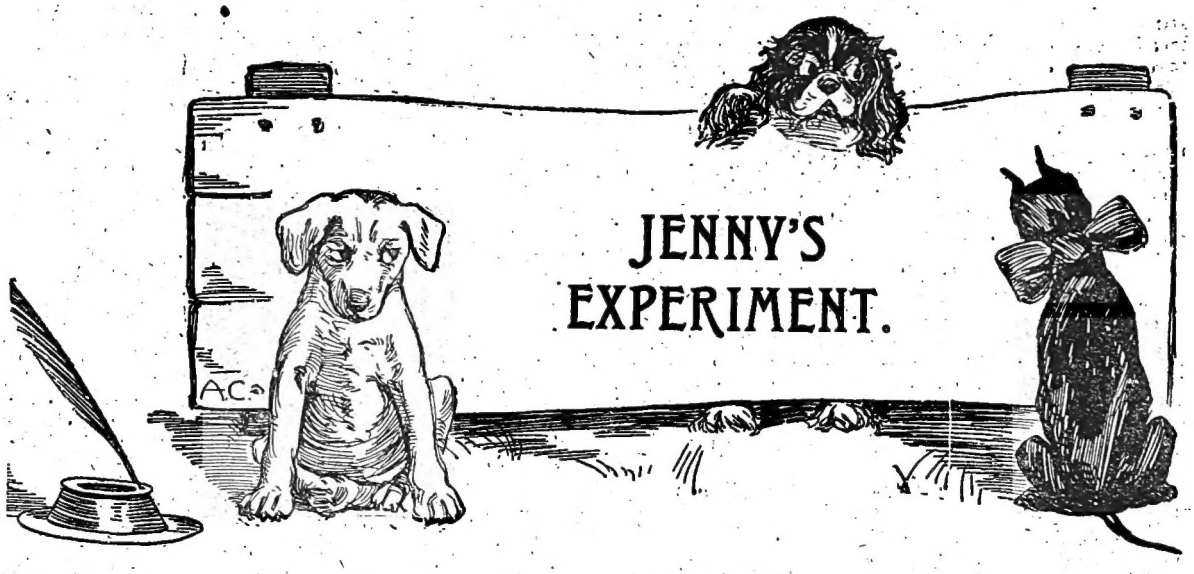

JENNY'S EXPERIMENT.

"I SHALL get along with him, I'm sure," said Jenny Read.

"Nobody could get along with him!" chorused the three other Misses Read.

Uncle Grant was the personage of whom they spoke—a crabbed, ill-tempered, little old man—who lived in a superb old country house in Derbyshire.

He had money to leave, but his nieces and nephews secretly believed that it would be much easier to go to Klondyke or West Australia and dig out fortunes, nugget by nugget, than to stay at home and earn them by making themselves acceptable to an old gentleman who had as many angles as a rose diamond, and as many prickly spikes (of temper) as a porcupine.

Lucy Read had tried it first. She was a soft-voiced, slender girl, with a head which reminded one of a drooping lily.

"No one can help loving Lucy," said Mrs. Read as she kissed her daughter good-bye.

But in three weeks Lucy came back half frightened out of her wits.

"He scolds so dreadfully," she said. "And he looked at me as the wolf must have looked at Little Red Riding Hood. Oh, mamma, I couldn't stay there, not if I were to be made richer than the Queen herself!"

Madge went next; but although a fine, tall girl, with a spirit of her own, she was cowed by Uncle Grant's savage eyes in less than a week.

"I'd sooner sweep a crossing for a living," said she, "than be uncle's heiress."

And so she came home without loss of time.

Amy, in no wise abashed by the successive failures of her sisters, was the third one to try the Grange and its possibilities. But she also succumbed before the terrible scourge of Uncle Grant's tongue.

"It's scold, scold, scold, from morning till night!" said Amy, as in a fortnight's time she tearfully related her experience to her parents.

"Oh, you don't know—nobody can know—what a dreadful man uncle is!"

"Oh, bother the old scamp!" said Mr. Read, who was of a free and easy nature, and thought his girls a great deal too sweet and nice to be snarled at by any rich old miser.

"Let him alone. My daughters needn't go begging for any man's money."

But here Jenny, the youngest, tallest and prettiest of the four girls, spoke up:

"I'll go!" said she.

"You don't know what you are undertaking," said Lucy, with a shudder.

"He'd wear out a stone," said Madge.

"He's a ghoul!" shuddered Amy.

"I shall get along with him, I am sure," said Jenny brightly.

And she packed up her little trunk and went to the Grange.

It was sunset when she walked up the flight of steps that led to the house.

Uncle Grant was standing at the top.

"So you are Jenny?" said he, surveying her with little twinkling eyes like glass beads.

"Yes, I am Jenny," said the bright-cheeked girl, giving him a kiss.

"You're late," said Uncle Grant.

"I am late," said Jenny. "I thought the wretched train never would have got here."

"It's a dreadfully warm day," growled Uncle Grant.

"I'm almost roasted," sighed Jenny.

"The whole summer has been intolerably warm," said the old gentleman.

"We might as well be in the tropics, and be done with it," retorted Jenny, flinging off her hat and fanning herself vehemently.

Uncle Grant gave her the keys that night, just as he had three times before given them to her three sisters.

"I shall expect you to take charge of the whole establishment," said he. "The servants are miserable——"

"No more than one might expect," interrupted Jenny, with a deprecatory motion of the hand. "Servants are no good at all now-a-days."

"And nothing goes right in this place."

"Nothing ever does!" said Jenny.

Uncle Grant eyed her furtively.

This was quite different from the determined cheerfulness and systematic good spirits of her sisters.

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At breakfast next morning Uncle Grant began to scold as usual.

"Fish again!" said he. "This makes four mornings this week we've had fish."

"I detest fish!" said Jenny, pushing away her plate with a grimace.

"And the rolls heavy again!" growled Uncle Grant, breaking one open.

"Please give me the plate, uncle," said Jenny as she rang the table bell sharply.

Mrs. Betts, the cook, a stout, good-humoured woman, made her appearance.

"Mrs. Betts," said Miss Read, "be so good as to throw these rolls out of the window."

The cook stared.

"Do you hear what I tell you?" said Miss Read with emphasis.

And Mrs. Betts flung the rolls out among the rose-bushes, where they were speedily devoured by Cato, the Newfoundland dog, and Rob and Roy, the two poodles.

"But what am I to eat for breakfast?" bewailed Uncle Grant.

"Biscuits, of course," said Jenny. "Anything is better than imperilling one's digestion with such stuff as this! And, Mrs. Betts, if you send up any more fish for the next month you may consider yourself discharged, do you hear?"

"But, my dear, I am rather fond of fish," put in the old gentleman.

"One can't eat fish the whole time," said Jenny imperiously. "Here, Mrs. Betts, this coffee isn't fit to drink! And the toast is burnt! And you must have put the cooking butter on the table by mistake! Let these errors be rectified at once."

Mrs. Betts retired with an ominous rustle on her stiffly starched apron.

"My dear," said Uncle Grant apprehensively, "Mrs. Betts is a very old servant, and——"

"I don't care if she is the age of Methuselah," said Jenny, "nobody can be expected to put up with such wretched cooking as this!"

"I really think she is not so bad, if—"

"Oh, pray don't apologise for her, uncle!" said Jenny. "They are all shiftless, lazy creatures, who must be discharged promptly if they don't do their duties."

Uncle Grant began to look frightened. He had kept Mrs. Betts, Annie and old John for ten years. Was it possible that he had scolded at them for ten years, only to have his niece outscold him now?

"I wouldn't be too hasty with them, my dear, if I were you," he remonstrated.

"Then let them do their duty," said Jenny, with the air of an empress.

"We are all mortal," pleaded Uncle Grant.

He ate the rest of his breakfast with but little appetite.

Annie, the housemaid, was finishing dusting his library when he entered it.

"Not done yet!" growled Uncle Grant, the fretwork of wrinkles once more coming into his brow.

"Annie," said Miss Read severely, "if this happens again I shall dispense with your services! Look at that clock! Is this the time of day to be dawdling about the rooms with a broom and duster? Remember, Mr. Grant does not pay you exorbitant wages to lie in bed until midday!"

"My dear," said Uncle Grant, "Annie is generally a very good girl, if——"

"Dear uncle," interrupted Jenny, "pray permit me to be the judge of these matters. You have ruled your household with a slack and indulgent hand altogether too long. I shall now institute a reform."

Annie had never moved about so briskly as she did that day.

Old John, the gardener, was not exempt from his share of the general turmoil. Miss Read chanced to hear her uncle reproaching the old man for some fancied neglect in the flower beds, whose diamonds, ovals, and crescents of brilliant colours were the pride of his horticultural heart, and she promptly came to his aid.

"Gardening, indeed! Do you call this gardening?" she said. "Uncle Grant, I'm astonished that you keep such a man as that about the place!"

And the torrent of reproaches which she showered upon the luckless head of poor old John was enough, as that individual observed, "to make one's flesh creep."

"My niece is a young lady of spirit and energy," apologised Mr. Grant, when at last Jenny had gone back to the house.

"Verra like you, sir, verra like you," said old John, scratching his head.

"Like me," said Mr. Grant slowly.

He stood full five minutes, quite speechless and motionless, staring at the mossy rim of an ancient sun-dial half sunk in the velvet grass. And at the end of five minutes he uttered the words again, slowly:

"Like—me!"

"There's no knowin' the master, he's that changed," said Mrs. Betts in the kitchen, a week or two later. "He's as mild as a lamb and as peaceful as a kitten."

"Isn't that what the young lady told us," said Annie, "when she came down into the kitchen that first morning after the fire was lighted, and told us she was going to try an experiment, we wasn't to mind a word she said, 'cause it was all by contraries? 'He doesn't know what his temper has got to be,' said she, 'and I am going to show him.' And, bless her sweet heart, her plan has worked like a charm."

It had, in good truth. Uncle Grant was a changed man.

And Jenny had relapsed into the original sunshine of her temper—and all the domestic wheels of the Grange seemed to revolve on velvet.

But Uncle Grant took all the credit to himself. He never knew that Jenny had taught him a lesson.

"We can get along very nicely," said he, "now that my niece has subdued those little tempers of hers."

And Jenny was his heiress and darling after all—for he will always believe that it was he "who formed her character."

T. Buchanan.

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This is the title of the new serial story to commence in the August Bank Holiday Number of *Pearson's Weekly*. Get the paper. Read the story.

The August Bank Holiday Number of *Pearson's Weekly* will be a big thing in every way. Look out for it.

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Told in the Indian Bazaar.

By H. HUNTER.

No. IV.

THE MAGIC THREAD.

In the venerable hamlet of Kurungabad, on the lovely banks of the Jumna, lived a wealthy Brahmin named Benee See.

Three fine old banyan trees stood in front of his dwelling, screening it from the too persistent attentions of the sun, and affording a lodgment to a family of holy crows, which the good man fed daily with his own hand; and, what is even more singular, at the expense of his own pocket. He was a man of very strict habits, punctual and regular in his devotions; never scamping a single ablution, never omitting to perform a single ceremony mentioned in the Shastras, or neglecting to pronounce a single *Om* whenever that sacred syllable occurred in the service.

If you think this behaviour extraordinary in a man of wealth and station, I must tell you that Benee was past his meridian, which may account for a good deal.

To be sure, Benee had been rather a wild goat in his youth, so that he had a tolerably heavy lot of arrears behind him; and, alas! for this old-time "gay-and-festive," this now penitent son of twenty generations of Brahmins, there were only a few years left, out of what at the beginning had looked an interminable series, in which he could hope to "fetch up."

So Benee See, who had lived too free, was now become a devotee.

As a young "exquisite" he had preferred the pleasant service of Krishna to the gruesome slavery of Kali; and in the enjoyment of every sweet morsel he could lay hands on, had scorned to count the slow passing of the seasons, which nevertheless come and go as appointed, without caring much whether the children of this world use them to profit or employ them in vanity; and each had left the trace of its finger upon the handsome forehead of Benee See.

As a man of a certain age, Benee grudged the passing of every day, numbering even the smallest fragments of the hurrying hours, acting, indeed, on the well-known principle of "milking the bull when the cow's dry."

He, who had never troubled himself about times and seasons and rites and ritual, now never forgot, though it might be 10 p.m.—a most unseemly hour by the way for the serious minded—when he spread his mat upon the terrace, to repeat the night prayer, before stretching out his limbs to sleep.

Being long past his prime, Benee See was now in a fair way of becoming a holy man.

One day when Benee had gone into the jungle to pay his devotions at an ancient shrine in a banyan grove—a secret altar, erected by the dwarfs in honour of the forest deity—he was surprised to see, sitting under the shade of a peepul tree, a maiden of a beauty surpassing everything in the shape of female loveliness with which his youthful eyes had made him acquainted.

Why, oh! why had this adventure not come to him in the springtide of his years?

He was sensible of a strangely delicious thrill which made his head reel and his limbs tremble. Was the damsel of this world, or a visitor from another?

Never, thought he, had he beheld a form so alluring, features of such heavenly mould, lips red as a pomegranate bud, eyes dark as a moonless night, but brighter than the stars in Orion, teeth like a double row of opals, hands and feet whose shape and delicacy were proof beyond doubting that the lady was "good stock," and her caste the highest and purest in the land.

Coming unexpectedly into the presence of so much sweetness and beauty, Benee felt abashed, overcome, lifted up, and cast down. For a space he stood like one spell-bound. Why was loveliness so enchanting wasting itself among the groves and alleys of the jungle?

He felt a pain at the heart. The blood rushed through his veins like the nullahs of the Jumna in flood-time. The vows he had registered, the resolutions not to do "this," and not to do "that"—the list, he remembered, included a resolve not to talk to pretty girls by the well side—upon finding that, "this and that" had become more plague than pleasure to him, were swept away now like twigs by the current.

When he took up the part of devotee, Benee had convinced himself that it was the only *rôle* in the great drama that was left for him to play. Now, in the conflict of his emotions, forgetting that since they had lost flavour for him he had abjured the "pomps and vanities," he wished himself twenty years younger. Here was an

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adventure which promised to enlarge his experience, to lead to new and surprising developments; but, alas! his time was past.

Opportunity, thought he, mostly had the awkward habit of coming too soon or arriving too late.

He had regretfully determined that he would probably be better occupied at the temple of the Blue God than at the shrine of Kama—the lovely boy with the sugar-cane bow—when the lady, without the least speck of shyness—tired, perhaps, of so much staring without any talking—addressed him thus:

"I am the daughter of a king whose city lies on the other side of the jungle towards the west. I was betrothed to a prince of the Royal House of Meru; a man of handsome mien and noble presence. When the emperor who came from the North, having heard of the mine of glittering gems and the treasure in the mountains of Meru, spread himself over all that country, my father and the Prince, my betrothed, went out against him. But it was written that they should not return; and, alas! my eyes beheld them no more. They died, but their bodies were carried straight to Heaven by the Celestial messengers. On the spot where they fell, nothing was found but a heap of rose leaves.

"When the conqueror came to the city, I fled to the jungle. Azee, the King of the Dwarfs, found me, and here I have lived, protected by his people, ever since."

Benee, who had scarcely dared to breathe whilst the silvery notes tripped lightly off the lady's tongue, now ventured to ask if Her Highness had any commands for her servant.

From under her long dark lashes the Princess sent forth a whole sheaf of arrows before replying, every one of which left a flaming wound in Benee See's poor fluttering heart—the organ whose supersensitiveness had been both bliss and bane.

A dizziness came over him. He leant against a tamala tree for support. He heard the voice of the Princess murmuring soft syllables in his ear, but his head was humming like a bramra bee. What was it she was saying? His head was going round like a spinning-top. Not a word of her pretty speech could he distinguish, but her accents were sweet and low. The next moment he felt himself slipping to the ground, then he lost consciousness, and the world was a blank.

When he came to himself, which he did very quickly, Benee See was alone; but the flutter of a female garment, the peepul tree under which she had sat, and a sandal which she had left behind her in her hasty flight, were convincing proof that the scene he had passed through was no vision of the brain, but a very real and actual experience. After depriving him of his faculties by the magnetism of her glance, she had fled from his grey beard and uncurled moustachios.

He looked at the sandal mournfully, sighed, stuck it in his bosom, rubbed his forehead, and got up.

"Love," said he, "Love, mysterious, maddening joy! I never thought to know thy pangs again. But then," he added, "I never expected to meet this charming Princess; and, alas! also the infirmities of——" he sighed more deeply than ever. "Ah, me!" he went on, "that at fifty-five I should still be the slave of Kama. Love, thou art indeed a drunkard's cup—delicious, delirious, delusive. Yet now, if it were possible that I could marry that lovely Princess, and live again for just one circuit of the seasons as in the happy, happy days of youth, I could be content after that to beg my way to Benares on foot, and die a mendicant in the holy city."

"Take this thread," he said.

Whilst he had been speaking he had been walking in the direction in which he had seen the flutter of the silken scarf. He had a vague hope that he might see the Princess again. He had quite forgotten the Blue Shrine in the banyan grove. After walking for an hour he came to a road by the side of which sat a yellow fakeer, begging.

Now, Benee had never seen a yellow fakeer. The

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*gurus**, he knew, believed there was but one; and that he was only seen by those to whom he was sent. Benee wondered if he had anything to do with the charming Princess. He approached, and threw a coin on the dirty rag which was stretched at the feet of the yellow man.

"My blessing be upon thee, my son," said the fakeer; and drawing a short length of scarlet thread from a wallet that lay by his side, "take this thread," he said, "and before thou liest down upon thy carpet to-night, bind it round thy arm between the shoulder and the elbow. It is *Junwa*†—the sacred syllables *Bhuh* and *Svar* have been pronounced over it. It has the power of Maghrabi magic in the third degree. Wear it constantly, and no evil can harm thee. Wish, and it shall give thee thy heart's desire."

When he had gone a little distance Benee See looked back, but the yellow fakeer had disappeared; there was nothing on the road but a thin cloud of dust.

The Magic Thread, the yellow fakeer, and the beautiful Princess, filled Benee's thoughts so completely when he spread his mat upon the roof that the night prayer was quite forgotten. But the scarlet thread was wound about his arm—it was barely long enough, he had observed, as he fastened it carefully, to go round once. "However," he reflected, "there it is. It will not be necessary to remove it, so there it can stay." Then he lay down and fell asleep, wishing himself again a young man of five-and-twenty, and also that he might soon have another chance of meeting the amiable Princess. On awaking in the morning Benee was quickly sensible that a delightful change had passed over him. He had gone back thirty years. His youth was renewed, his vigour restored, his spirits had recovered elasticity. He dressed himself with care, annointed his person with attars and spices, curled his moustachios, put the lady's sandal into his bosom, and went off to the jungle.

Before doing so, however, he took care to rescind all the resolutions he had made on becoming a devotee, circumstances having now rendered them unnecessary. They could be renewed, if required, at a later opportunity. At twenty-five a man may surely be pardoned for declining to be bound by the vows of fifty.

Benee had not gone very far in the direction of the peepul tree before he caught sight of the Princess, who was sitting beneath it.

"Ah!" thought he, "she expects me evidently. But it's not I who'll be surprised this time, my Princess," and, twirling his moustachios fiercely, he marched up to the tree. Then, seeing that she did not start, shiver, or scream, but only drew her veil coquettishly across the lower half of her face, while the lightning of her eyes threatened to reduce him to speechlessness, if the spell were not broken, he addressed her.

"Great Princess," he began; but finding a difficulty in proceeding with those twin orbs scintillating in front of him, he drew from its hiding place the lady's sandal, and inquired artlessly if she recognised it.

"Indeed, I do," she said, smiling. "I lost it yesterday in the jungle, and have come out to-day to look for it. Where, pray, did you find it?"

Then Benee See, taking firm hold of opportunity, declared himself:

"I am he, Princess, who yesterday was smitten to the ground by the fire of thine eyes," telling how the fire had consumed his heart and done serious damage to his head; how he would rather live with her for one year than without her for a thousand, since beauty so bewitching must surely transcend even that of the Heavenly dancers. How he had seen the yellow fakeer, who had given him the Magic Thread, and how, having by virtue of its mystic power obtained a renewal of his youth, he had risen early in the morning and returned to the jungle, determined there to stay till he had found her, if he had to seek as long as it would take to travel from Patal-puri to Parigat.*

"The power of holy men," said the Princess, and in Benee's eager ears her voice sounded ravishing as the voices of the minstrels in the Halls of Dazzling Light, "is not to be questioned by the sinful sons of earth; but devotion so uncommon is a rarity in a mortal. And you really are the good man who passed here yesterday on his way to the Blue Shrine in the banyan grove? Excuse me," she said, looking at him provokingly, "I shouldn't have thought it."

"Let the sandal, oh, Princess, which I delivered to thee, make answer for me!" replied the unabashed Benee See.

"It is well," said the Princess, smiling upon him graciously, "yet nothing is so good but it might be better. A sandal? Well, fifty people may find a sandal, but only one man wears the Magic Thread. Show it me now, then shall I be convinced that thou art the man."

So Benee showed the arm on which was wound the Magic Thread.

"Dear! dear!" said the Princess, looking much concerned. "It's cutting the flesh. It's tied a great deal too tight. Surely you must find it very inconvenient to have the muscles confined in this fashion? Let me loosen it—just a bit."

"Take care!" said Benee, "take care!" for the Princess's fingers were busy with the Thread. "There's just enough to go round, but not a hair's-breadth over. I'd rather put up with the inconvenience and insure the advantage than——"

But the Princess had succeeded—the Thread was off, and Benee breathlessly watching her attempts to refasten it.

She tried here, and tried there, but try where she would she couldn't make the two ends meet. Benee, conscious that a change had already begun to come over him—his blood was running slower, his pulse falling lower—begged her to give him the Thread, or to tie it where it had been tied before. But she refused, saying that she could manage it very well if he wouldn't be so impatient. And all the time Benee was rapidly gaining in years and losing in spirits.

At last, when Benee found himself again a greybeard of five-and-fifty, it came to an open quarrel.

"I've seen many a better stick in the jungle," cried the Princess; and, calling him a "miserable double-dealing old deceiver," she threw down the Thread and walked off. But before Benee could possess himself of the magic filament, a crow flew out of a neighbouring tree, pounced on the prize, and bore it away.

Benee See was never seen again at his home on the lovely banks of the Jumna; but at the Blue Shrine in the banyan grove there has been a resident *Jogi*† ever since.

* Spiritual teachers. † Possessed of mystic virtues.

* From the lower to the higher regions. † Holy man.

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SAVED BY A RING.

"I HAVE heard you say that the West Coast of Africa used to be a rough spot, Captain, when you commanded a brig trading with that part of the world. Now, *you* can surely tell us a thrilling story!"

That was touching the Captain in a weak spot. He was just a trifle vain, and his vanity was tickled by being called upon to amuse the company with some story in which he had figured prominently. He made a pretence of modest hesitation; then "went ahead" abruptly, without any preliminaries.

"Sailing in those parts had been dangerous, but the piratical craft had been scared away by the British war vessels, and I felt pretty safe.

"I left port with a hold well stored with valuable merchandise and quite a respectable sum of money.

"In the forward saloon or second cabin were nine Spaniards returning to their own country. They had been employed out there and had had enough of it. They were swarthy-looking fellows, with scowling figure-heads, and glittering black eyes reflecting cruelty in every glance and expression.

"I never did like a Spaniard, never having experienced the fine boasted courtesy coupled with the high chivalry of the hidalgos of Castile.

"In the after cabin, for one passenger I had a fine-looking young fellow, a midshipman attached to a British vessel looking after slavers and the like, who had been down with fever. He was going home in order to fully recover his health.

"I had one other passenger, a Spanish maiden about twenty years old, who occupied the best state-room in the after cabin, and I must confess that her beautiful hair, black and luxuriant eyes, expressive and soft as a gazelle's, complexion like a peach, coquettish airs, and a form that rivalled a full clipper in rounded, swelling lines and, and——"

"Never mind, Captain, about the young lady. You have said enough, and we can imagine the balance of the loveliness."

"Hum—exactly! Well, to heave ahead. I rather pitied that young lady, for she could not speak a word of English, had nothing to say to the tawny-skinned fellows in the second cabin, while the midshipman could not make use of a single Spanish phrase, and *I* knew nothing of her lingo.

"But that part of it did not appear to affect the efforts of the young officer to make himself agreeable. He proceeded deliberately to make love to the señorita, every opportunity that offered, talking away as fast as his tongue would permit, with his hand on his heart and face flushed by the earnestness of his efforts. While she, laughing and jabbering in the soft musical tones of her language, would sing and coo, her voice ringing through the cabin with a rare cadence, when the handsome, careless dog was idling by her side.

"She was evidently possessed of wealth; at least I judged so from the fact of her having such a profusion of diamonds, which she displayed with childish pride; her costumes being revelations of lace, richness and harmony of colour, even if bordering a trifle on the fanciful in detail and conception. What she had been doing in those parts I did not know

"The middy had my best wishes for capturing the prize. He was a good fellow and jolly comrade. But what puzzled me was how they got on so well, when neither could understand the other; but love, it is said, has a language of its own.

"We were making slow progress, and waiting for a breeze, when one of the crew at work on the fore topsail yard reported a sail in sight broad off the beam. Now, a sail in those days in that vicinity required caution in approaching, for there was no knowing what moment a piratical craft might heave in sight, with chances in favour of all hands 'walking the plank.'

"I jumped into the fore-rigging to have a better look at the sail through my glass. It was not much larger than a gull's wing.

"The wind was light and variable, the sun dazzled my eyes and a slight swell rather interfered with my investigation, which tended to keep me aloft much longer than I had intended. I finally returned to the deck, satisfied that we had nothing to fear from the strange craft.

"Descending the after-companionway, I entered the cabin with the intention of taking a short siesta in my state-room while waiting for a breeze to spring up, but had hardly composed matters to my satisfaction, when a light, quick footstep crossed the cabin, and the middy entered my room without knocking, somewhat to my surprise and displeasure as well.

"I was on the point of reading the free-and-easy gentleman a lesson in etiquette, when I chanced to catch his eye, and I saw at once that something unusual had occurred.

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"His voice dropped to a whisper as he gained the side of my berth, and an electric shock seemed to run through my heart as he laid his white hand impressively on my shoulder.

"'Captain,' he whispered, 'our lives are in jeopardy. There are pirates on board.'

"'Pirates!' I exclaimed, hastily swinging my legs over the berth. 'Where are they?' and I was conscious that my face was blanched as we gazed into each other's eyes.

"'The Spaniards in the forward cabin, and their active ally, the señorita—the brains and leader of the gang.'

"I looked at the officer in astonishment, thinking for a moment that he had taken a glass of grog or so too much; but the steady gaze of his clear, grey eyes refuted at once the suspicion, forcing upon me the conviction that serious business confronted both him and me.

"'How did you discover all this, and how long have you been in possession of the facts?'

"'Oh, I've had my eyes and ears open since I first came on board, and have never neglected an opportunity to listen to any stray word that might fall from any of them.'

"'Why, look here, confound it! What do you mean? Did you not tell me yourself that you could not speak a word of Spanish, and have I not heard you using the most absurd broken English when talking nonsense to the señorita, as if that would help matters between you?'

"'I admit all as you state it, but had an object in view when denying knowledge of the Spanish language. I pleaded ignorance of Spanish because the day I came on board this vessel, I assisted that pretty-faced demon over the gangway, and noticed on her hand a gem that glittered and sparkled like the eye of a cobra. The mounting was so peculiar and odd that it could not fail to attract my attention, and you must have been attracted by it.'

"I nodded.

"'Well, sir, that ring was once the property of my uncle. He started two years ago from that very port to visit his relations in London, but has never been heard of since.

"My suspicions were aroused at once, coupled with the decidedly cut-throat, hang-dog expression of your Spanish passengers.

"'While I have been flirting with the señorita and she pretending to listen coyly to the unintelligible nonsense poured into those pink ears of hers—she knows English, though!—she was coolly plotting, at various times, with some members of the gang, who generally were not far off, suggesting how to slit my throat without creating an alarm.

"'They have full knowledge of the amount of treasure on board, which, together with the vessel, they purpose gaining possession of, then seek some haunt known to them. I have no doubt they murdered my uncle and will murder us, unless we manage to circumvent their plans.'

"'How have they arranged to carry out their murderous scheme?'

"'While you were aloft, looking after that strange sail, they had the opportunity they wished for, for a last grand confab. They are to rise to-night, and imagine the vessel will fall an easy prey to their superior numbers. The capture would have been made shortly after leaving port but for the advice of the señorita. She was apprehensive of the erratic movements of a British ship just now in the vicinity, and desired to gain a good offing with a clear run for their rendezvous. Now listen carefully to their plan of operations.

"'They will all sleep on deck to-night with the plea that it is too hot and stifling below deck. Two of them will be stationed aft to attend to the mate and man at the wheel, the officer off watch will be knifed by another scoundrel, who will then join his comrades forward in murdering the crew—the signal for the attack being three raps on forward cabin companion way.'

"'And who is to look after our interests? You and I?'

"'Oh, I omitted that! The pretty Spanish damsel has guaranteed to carve our windpipes in the most approved manner. Her stiletto has been sharpened to an edge and point fine as a needle. There, sir, you have it all from their standpoint, and I must say they have worked it out very well, in every manner but one.'

"'And that?'

"'Is the successful carrying out of their game. Life is sweet to me, Captain, and I presume it is to you. I have no desire to lose the number of my mess. I'll fight, depend upon that, and as captain of your own ship, I simply ask for my station and part of the work you desire me to attend to, with a full knowledge of your general plan of operations.'

"For the next half hour I can assure you I did some pretty hard thinking, for it was a matter of life and death, with but little time to devise means of defence or escape.

"To begin with, there were no arms on board the vessel, while the Spaniards were undoubtedly armed to the teeth. The midshipman had a pair of pistols and his light dress sword, the only weapons that could be counted upon for the defence.

"I relied upon our strong hope and the possibility that would count largely in our favour—the overweening confidence of the pirates, with their well laid plans and the apparent helplessness of the victims within their grasp.

"The men were quietly communicated with, the midshipman was made thoroughly acquainted with my plans, the officers were posted, while the steward easily carried the details to the men in the forecastle.

"The Spaniards only counted on having one watch on deck, but as it was necessary to have all hands, I resorted to a little stratagem. Quietly removing a portion of the quicksilver from its receptacle on the barometer, I summoned the mates in great excitement taking care to show the Spanish scoundrels that the mercury had dropped to an alarming point, fortune aiding me by a dense bank of black and threatening clouds hanging on the horizon. Sail was shortened, hatches battened down, extra lashings put on everything movable about decks; and I noted with one eye of satisfaction that a thick cloud of smoke was pouring from the galley smoke-pipe, while the men walked the deck with belaying pins close at hand, but carefully suppressing all appearances of excitement.

"The mate walked the top of the house with a hatchet stowed in the bosom of his voluminous shirt. The midshipman lounged on one side of the quarter deck with his pistol ready: while I stood by the main liferail, apparently intent upon studying the aspect and possibilities of the weather, my right hand clutching the butt of the officer's spare pistol, and an eye fixed upon all moving objects.

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"Gradually the men dropped into the shadows forward, apparently dozing, the positions of the Spaniards being easily detected by the small glowing light that emanated from their cigarettes.

"This disposition of the crew and officers of the vessel had somewhat disconcerted and upset the plans of the plotters; but they were by no means thwarted in the task they had undertaken.

"The Spaniards merely sent another man or two aft to cope with the middy and myself, and not a suspicion of discovery or defeat evidently had entered into their calculations.

"With the tap of the bell announcing ten o'clock, three distinct raps echoed through the ship, and in an instant the whole scene changed as if by magic. Pandemonium appeared to have broken loose in that little space, so calm and peaceful only a moment before.

"I had no time or opportunity to attend to anything for an instant but my own personal safety, for one of the Spaniards leapt upon me with the ferocity of a panther, the blade of his two-edged dagger glittering wickedly in the dim starlight; but, with a cool, steady aim, I covered the villain's breast, and he fell without a groan, shot through the heart.

"Seizing an iron belaying pin from the rail, I dealt the fellow who was hacking at the mate, a stunning blow, and then had an opportunity to look about me, as the mate rolled the body of his late antagonist overboard.

"The middy had not used his pistol, but, depending upon his sword, was on the point of giving the *coup de grâce* to a burly ruffian who had attacked him.

"Forward, the battle was raging fiercely, the loud yells of the combatants ringing out in terrible discords, varied occasionally by frenzied shrieks of agony, as Sam, the athletic black cook, dealt out his stock of boiling hot water, of which he had been instructed to have an unlimited supply.

"The Spaniards were capering about like so many dancing masters, having little or no opportunity to use firearms, not anticipating the slightest resistance, and depending upon their knives for the deadly work in hand.

"The seamen presented a bold front, while the cook kept up an increasing stream of scalding water, compelling the survivors to seek safety in flight as they were charged by the men flushed with victory.

"Amid the tramp and the turmoil, the cabin door flew open, and the woman appeared with a pistol in each hand, her eyes blazing like two coals of fire. She uttered a passionate cry as she realised that her scheme had failed, failed at every point, while the sailors drove a number of the pirates overboard.

"But one of the gang remained on the deck of the brig in possession of a weapon. He was the youngest and best looking of the party.

"He had his cape wrapped round his left arm, his dagger ready for instant action, as he crept round and round the middy, who, with sword carefully poised, watched every movement of his lithe foe.

"We were all more or less worked up and excited over the combat, and, having full faith and confidence in the naval officer's ability to defend himself, all crowded round to witness the duel *à la mort*. As a matter of precaution the woman had been disarmed, and was compelled to watch the phases of the closing scene in the tragedy.

"The pirate had retreated before an impetuous assault of the officer, when, tripping over a ring bolt, he was thrown off his guard for a brief interval of time, sufficient, however, to seal his fate, the bright blade of the middy passing through his body. He fell without a gasp.

"Wild and unearthly the señorita's voice rang out in fierce denunciation; then, wresting herself free, she picked up a dagger that had fallen on deck and plunged it into her bosom, sinking by the inanimate body while her life blood mingled with his.

"It was the last crowning act of death and violence in that struggle for life, and as I gazed about the deck it had the appearance of a slaughter pen.

"No, I have never been in any similar position since, and have no desire for further adventures of that kind."

R. Hawley.

THE PRESS IN PRAISE OF M.A.P.,

The New Penny Society Paper, Edited by Mr. T. P. O'CONNOR.

The "Daily Chronicle" says:

It has the all-important quality of interestingness in a promising degree. Its paragraphs are fresh and striking; its tone is easy without being offensive; it suits the man or woman tired with serious affairs. The paper is brimful of gossip about all classes and divisions of society.

The "Daily Telegraph" says:

One of the most entertaining features of the opening number is the chapter of autobiographical detail, contributed by Sir Edward Clarke, under the title, "In the Days of My Youth."

The "St. James's Gazette" says:

Every page of "M. A. P." is packed with attractive chit-chat and personal, but not offensive, gossip. Mr. O'Connor may be treading upon rather thin ice in this new venture of his; but his aim, he says, is to avoid the "indefensible, scandalous, and abominable," and, if he does that, we see no reason why "M. A. P." should not be a distinct success.

The "Freeman's Journal" says:

The first number of "M. A. P.," Mr. T. P. O'Connor's new weekly penny paper, promises exceedingly well. It is bright, chatty, entertaining, full of interesting information about well-known people, contains more than one good story, and is altogether a most acceptable addition to the weekly press. "M. A. P." has only to maintain the standard set in its opening number to become one of the most successful publications of its kind.

The "Dundee Advertiser" says:

It is extremely well got up, and full of interesting and readable matter. As its name implies, it deals mainly with persons, and it aims, in fact, at being a cheap, but high-class Society journal. "M. A. P." will be a formidable rival to the high-priced Society papers.

The "Western Mercury" says:

What promises to be a very attractive feature of Mr. T. P. O'Connor's new journal, "M. A. P." is the weekly "Chapter of Autobiography." Sir Edward Clarke writes the first chapter, and a very bright and interesting story it is.

The "Bradford Observer" says:

It is extremely well got up, and full of interesting and readable matter.

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THE GLADIATOR

A TALE OF THE EASTERN EMPIRE

By GEORGE C. WALLIS.

PART THE FIRST.

"The Ambitions of Youth."

SUMMARY.

The opposing factions in the public games of ancient Constantinople were known as the "Blues and Greens." The Emperor and Empress favoured the Blues, and consequently the enmity that existed between the two factions was so strong that they could not meet in the streets without coming to blows.

Rhesus, a country youth from Sicily, lands at Constantinople with his friend, Proclus, and with a fixed determination to become famous as a gladiator. He adopts the cause of the Greens, and the first contest in which he takes part is a chariot race, which he would have won had it not been for the foul play of Hermiot, his opponent of the Blues.

Rhesus falls in love with Eutasia, a pretty little waif of the circus, of twelve years, who speedily becomes warmly attached to him.

A few years pass and Eutasia is affianced to Rhesus.

One night Proclus and Rhesus chance to overhear a plot between Hypatius, a claimant to the throne, Marcen, a gladiator of the green faction, and Hermiot of the Blues, to raise the city in revolt, remove Justinian from the throne, and make Hypatius emperor in his place.

Hypatius proceeds to take them singly down to the flooded catacombs under the ground upon which they are standing, where he has vast treasures stored with which he purposes to buy the sympathies of the people. Marcen goes with him first, leaving Hermiot on the watch. Rhesus and Proclus spring out upon Hermiot, bind and gag him. Upon the return of Hypatius and Marcen, Proclus assumes the blue sash of Hermiot, personates Hermiot under the cover of the darkness, and goes down into the catacombs with Hypatius in order to discover the whereabouts of the treasure.

CHAPTER V.

The Hall of Waters.

When Proclus and Hypatius had passed the door in the wall, and it had swung silently to behind them, the nephew of Anatasius bade his companion follow him closely, and went with confidence along a black, evil-smelling passage that sloped steeply downwards, emerging at last into a lofty chamber, lighted by a straggling moonbeam that crept through a slit in the stony roof. By the dim glow, torches were seen piled in a corner, and one of these Hypatius lit, and bound a dozen more in his belt, signing to Proclus to do likewise. He then went on his knees, and inserted his dagger point in one of the interstices of the rough flags, prized one up a little, and getting his hand underneath, raised it easily to a vertical position. The flickering glare of his torch showed the top of a flight of stairs, dark and damp with slime and green moss.

"You first," he whispered; "I follow."

Proclus, though carefully and rather afraid, went down as desired, and Hypatius, following, let down the stone behind him into its resting place.

Saving for the fitful yellow gleam of the torches, the two men were in absolute darkness, and in complete silence.

Between the damp walls, down that slippery stair, which to Proclus seemed interminable, in the gloom and the stillness, they went without speaking, until their footsteps echoed curiously hollow, and a strange clamminess was in the air; and at last the light from their torches fell on the level surface of still black water, and on the rounded shafts of several grey stone columns uprising from it, and losing themselves in the roof of murky shadow.

The stairs ended abruptly above the water, between two pillars, but a boat lay moored on that strange sea at the foot, and from the right hand pillar a thick chain, red and white with rust and slime, went out into the vagueness beyond.

Proclus, divining what was required of him, and not wishing to speak too much, stepped into the boat without a word, and drew out a pair of short sculls, which slipped between rowlocks of graven bronze. The boat had evidently seen better service than its present duty, he thought, noting this, and the elegance of her shape and lines. Then Hypatius placed torches in sockets in the boat-side, and steering close by the rotting chain, bade Proclus pull on without fear.

The great columns of smooth stone—the handiwork of artists whom the caprice of Constantine the Great had employed—loomed up out of the darkness they advanced into like grey ghosts of the under-world sailing slowly by. The unsteady light of the flaring torches cast long, waving shadows and bright, white gleams in alternation across the inky waters of that rippleless flood; and in the appalling silence the very sound of the oars dipping and rising seemed muffled and far away.

At length Hypatius spoke, his words sounding hollow and strange, and a faint refrain thereof went whispering weirdly down the shadowy colonnades that stretched through the slimy sea.

"It is a strange place, is it not, gladiator?" he asked. "A secure hiding-place for secret wealth; a fitting place wherein to bury the bodies of our foes? Methinks Belisarius, once here, would cause us no more apprehension."

"Indeed no," answered Proclus; "nor the Emperor himself."

A sardonic smile wreathed the face of Hypatius; a smile that well suited the gloomy place and the unnatural paleness of his features amid the encompassing grey and black shadows.

"A consummation devoutly to be wished, yet not easy of accomplishment," said he. "However, our other method has yet to fail. But have a care with the oars now, and slacken speed. We have passed the eleventh pillar, and the chain ends here. A little further on we should see the light of my brother's torch. He came in with us, and we left him with the treasure until our return. He is a worthy fellow, is Pompey, and did I not aspire to the throne myself. I would help him thereon. Ah! there is the gleam of his light."

Proclus half turned on the thwart and saw a dim glow ahead, just above the water; a yellow haze, at first diffused, but taking shape and definite outline as they neared. When the boat drew alongside it, he saw that the light proceeded from a torch held in the hand of an anxious-looking man

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attired in the garb of a monk, and that this man stood on a broad stone under a low arch that spanned a black looming passage in the wall. He noticed that the top of this passage sloped down sharply, and when, having secured the craft, they all went in, he found that it led, with sundry twists and turns, to a roomy cavern, whose sides and tops were thick with beads of moisture and clumps of moss.

And there, in the swaying light of Pompey's torch, lay massive ingots of gold, gleaming in dull, yellow pyramids built criss-cross fashion; earthern jars filled to the brim with costly jewels, both uncut and unpolished; a fabulous quantity of gold and silver pieces piled promiscuously against the farther wall; and drinking vessels and ornaments and arms of every shape and size, but all of priceless worth—the whole the ransom of many kings.

Avarice shone in the eyes of the three men as they looked on that huge hoard of wealth, and Proclus voiced the thoughts of his companions as well as his own when he said—disguising his voice:

"It is the legacy of a Crœsus! It is enough to buy the city twice over, and hurl a dozen emperors from their thrones."

"Then you are satisfied, Hermiot?" asked Hypatius, preparing to return.

"I am satisfied, and more," answered the cynic. "The crown is yours already. Let us get to work without delay. With a handful of those jewels and gold pieces the servants of the blue faction at the hippodrome are the servants of the Emperor Hypatius to-morrow."

"Take some then," said the claimant, visibly flattered with his supposed friend's enthusiasm. "Marcen has already taken a foretaste with him. And now we will go back."

"It is quite time," said Pompey, dashing his torch against the rock, and sending glowing sparks hissing to the damp floor.

"Yet one question," said Proclus. "How many know of this, saving myself and my friend Marcen? Too many tongues are dangerous."

"Saving yourself and your friend Marcen, none know the secret besides us two," Pompey replied, his brother assenting.

"Lead on then!" cried Proclus. "I am with you heart and soul, by the Holy Cross!"

Silently the three men went up the passage, and pulled back to the end of the chain, not finding it without difficulty and some anxious moments, and then rowed with a will to the foot of the green-covered steps, the torches casting huge and spectral shadows down the long dark avenues of the columns, and the swish of the sculls and the drip of the spray echoing faintly from the dim recesses, where the shades of eternal night brood over the sullen flood.

Half-way up the mossy steps the tramp of feet broke the dead silence, and as they hurried forward, the muffled thud of a heavy stone falling awoke their worst fears.

With blanched faces they dashed on. The flag was as they left it, and there was no sign of human presence, but when Pompey essayed to raise that bar to their egress, he found it immovable. Hypatius, white with fear, helped him, and Proclus joined, but though their muscles cracked with the effort, the stone remained firm.

The two traitors gazed at each other with wide-open eyes that said more than their lips dared utter, and despite the damp chill of the thick air, beads of perspiration broke out upon their foreheads, and their hands grew hot.

They were discovered, trapped; someone had found the secret of the passage, and barred the way, and made them prisoners in the Hall of Waters; and as one of the torches flared up suddenly and then spluttered out, the horror of their fate overcame them.

They leapt up at the impassive stone, beating it fiercely with their clenched hands; they called aloud like men possessed; they reviled and upbraided each other, and Proclus—who stood, not heeding them, with the one remaining light—and then sat down on the steps in helpless despair.

Proclus took two torches from his belt, and, lighting them with his, gave them into their hands in silence. The gruesome stillness remained unbroken, and the faint hopes of the three men died out slowly as the time passed and the torches steadily burnt down.

CHAPTER VI.

The Pursuit.

Rhesus was light of foot and very agile, so Marcen did not perceive his presence. The door swung back, and he went on down the dark passage hurriedly, but in silence. As silently as his ghost Rhesus followed. In the open space where the torches were piled, and a dim light shone through the slit in the roof, Marcen eagerly raised the stone flag, and bending down, listened at the top of the narrow stair. Rhesus remained in the dense shade of the passage, watching, and presently saw him rise hastily, let down the flag, drag another and a heavier stone from a corner, and poise it on one edge over the secret door. A slight, muffled sound seemed to come from underneath—Hypatius and his friend returning,

Proclus stepped into the boat.

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thought Rhesus—and hearing it, the traitor let fall the slab upon their only way of escape.

The thunderous crash of its fall rang dismally in the gloomy place, like a knell of doom, and from under it came a low babel of voices and a stifled cry. Blows were struck desperately on the under side of the flag, it shook with their violence, but it rose not, and soon all was still. Then the traitor, thinking his first task well accomplished, laughed softly to himself, and turned towards the place where Rhesus stood. Not wishing to cross swords with such a skilful fencer—at least until he had set his friend free—the latter stepped back quietly towards the door, intending to regain the outer air before he was seen, and then return to undo the foul work.

But half-way up the passage his foot unluckily slipped upon a smooth stone, and when he recovered his balance, Marcen was almost upon him. Scarcely thinking what he was doing, he ran on swiftly, casting caution to the winds,

Marcen came on furiously.

and Marcen, fearing treachery equal to his own, in close pursuit. He reached and passed the pivoted door, but even as it closed after him, it swung out again, and Marcen sprang through the gap and came tearing after the other, mad with rage. A dagger flew past Rhesus' head as he gained the open street, missing him only by a finger's breadth, and looking over his shoulder as he dashed into a narrow alley that led to the lowest and most intricate parts of the city, he saw that his foe was only a dozen paces behind.

Rhesus held on, threading the mazy streets of that vile quarter with a wonderful dexterity, and as he ran began to think more clearly. It was not in his nature to turn his back on a solitary foe like this, but once having started he had given up all advantage; and if he would save his friend Proclus from a fearful fate, he saw that he must not put his life in undue peril. He saw clearly now that he had made a great mistake in not attacking Marcen unawares in the dark tunnel, where he could easily have overpowered him; but now the opportunity was lost he must go on.

He rounded corners, dashed through little passages, under black arches, and doubled often upon his track, yet he could not shake Marcen off, and at last, growing tired of the ignominious chase, turned at bay in a wider street and drew his sword.

Marcen came on furiously, his own blade drawn, desperate indeed, but ere their weapons could cross, a car rattled past going towards the hippodrome. The driver wore a green badge, and striking up his foe's sword with a sweeping slash of his own, Rhesus sprang into the chariot, shouted to the man to lay on the thong, and as they whirled away, cast back a mocking laugh at his enemy.

But Rhesus laughed prematurely. Marcen was not shaken off so soon. Life and untold wealth were at stake, and he had many friends, and an unrivalled knowledge of the gay city.

He ran on a little way, then disappeared into a small inn, and presently, from a street at right angles to the one he had left, another chariot came rolling in pursuit. Two men stood in the car, urging on the fresh steeds with thong and voice, and one of the two was Marcen—his green sash changed for a band of blue.

The dawn was already breaking glorious from the portals of the golden east, and as the two chariots tore on, the streets and houses lost their shades and shadows, taking shape and brightness from the sun, and the people began to stir about the city.

Rhesus and the other belaboured their horses unmercifully, shouted, swore, and entreated them by turns; yet though steam rose from them and the white froth flecked their mouths, the traitor gained steadily.

Half-way from the circus the road made a great bend, at the farther end of which were stables for horses of the green faction. Could they reach that and change steeds before Marcen came up, they would escape. Leaving a smoking trail of dust on the dry street, they sped madly round the curve, Pelak, the driver, bracing himself in readiness to pull the animals to their haunches.

Rhesus glanced back. The pursuers were thundering after them like the sirocco, Marcen standing erect with bow taut and arrow drawn ready to his ear. The dwellings lay back in dim gardens there, and as the first car approached the stables, the horses made a good target for the marksman across them. Rhesus saw the driver slacken speed a moment, saw the shaft released, and heard the shaft rustle past him, and in an instant one of his steeds was down, struggling and kicking, and the other atop. The car lurched over, hurling Pelak to the ground, and by the time Rhesus had extricated himself from the tangle of horse-hoofs and traces, and dragged him out of harm's way, Marcen had dashed past on the other side, stopped and turned again, and with sword drawn, was advancing upon them. Leaving Pelak to recover from his faint just within the wicket of a great garden, Rhesus drew his blade and stood on the defensive.

A crowd was gathering now. The ever-ready rioters and assassins of both factions were flocking to the scene like vultures to a field of carnage, and someone raised the rallying cry of "*Nika!*" The arrogant wearers of blue clustered behind Marcen, hailing him as a new recruit, and Rhesus was not without backers who urged him to punish the renegade.

Yet now the two stood face to face, each felt disinclined to act. Marcen, naturally, had the least reluctance, but preferred to leave Rhesus until he had discovered whether he alone knew of the plot or had accomplices. For the other

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part, Rhesus was so concerned about his friend left in the Hall of Waters that he was loth to risk his life or his liberty in a street brawl. And the wolves of prey who were facing each other with deadly intent on their grim faces, were the lowest kind of villains that even Constantinople could boast. A stone flung at Rhesus—happily missing him—broke the spell of hesitation, and the two factions were at each other's throats.

As though moved by a common impulse, both Marcen and Rhesus slunk back as the others met, and losing sight of his foe for a moment, the latter entered the garden where he had left Pelak. The driver was recovered now, though his head had received an ugly blow, and said they had better be going to the hippodrome on foot by some quieter way, if thither his friend was aiming, "or, if not," he added, "we can help cut up this blue rabble."

He was a tall, bony fellow, wiry as an Italian, with a pair of fine black eyes, and Rhesus remembered, now that he came to look at his face more closely, that he was one of the charioteers who had raced for the green the first day he had trotted the steeds round the red sand of the arena. He was kind-hearted and true to the party, and a sudden resolve took hold of Rhesus.

"I care for neither of these things, friend," he said; "but if you care to help me in another desperate venture, which may mean death or a fortune to me and a goodly guerdon to yourself in any case, I shall be glad of your company."

The lanky giant seized the other's arm, and said:

"I am with you, Rhesus, in whatever wild work you have afoot. By all the vows of the Church which you believe not in, I am your man. Is it agreed?"

"Yes," said Rhesus, and straightway told him as much as he thought needful for him to comprehend that a great treasure, known only to a few, was hidden in the Hall of Waters, and that Marcen had played them false. He listened eagerly and asked for more.

"Tell me," he said, "whose treasure it is, and who is imprisoned there? I am asking a great deal, I know, but you can trust me."

Rhesus looked at him again, and felt that he could; he told all he knew; and they prepared to make their way back to the convent. At all costs Proclus must be saved.

While they had been consulting, the fight had raged furiously, new-comers had joined in it, and several were slain, but as Rhesus and the other stepped through the wicket the noise ceased suddenly, and a troop of soldiers came riding along, followed by a gorgeous chariot in which no less a personage than the Empress sat. Some of the rioters dispersed at sight of the soldiers, and the others followed when Theodora, mounting the seat of her car, railed at them for disloyal subjects in her most cutting style. Two of the assassins, both of the green faction, were executed on the spot by her command.

She was no longer a comedian; she had become an imperial tigress, a cunning stateswoman, a worthy counterbalance to her husband's failings. Her crown and white robe, enfolded by the cloak of purple, became her handsome form and features well, and as, after making some fruitless inquiries, she passed on, Rhesus followed her with eyes of admiration—which admiration turned to wonder when he saw the car stop a moment as Marcen mounted beside her,

Rhesus dragged him out of harm's way.

and then roll on again, bearing the two away in eager converse.

"I like not our friend's familiarity at all," said Pelak dubiously. "Our Empress is no ordinary woman, and has the threads of a dozen conspiracies in her hands at once, 'tis said. What if she and Marcen be in league over this treasure? It behoves us to hasten, Rhesus, if we would rescue the cynic; and it also behoves us to be cautious, for many doubtless know of the first chamber under the monastery, in which so many plots have been hatched."

They said no more, but quickened their steps, and going very carefully, knowing the lay of the streets well, at last came round the angle of the convent wall to the place where Hermiot had been left bound. He was not there, but scratched in the dust at the foot of the buttress was Rhesus' name. Obliterating the tell-tale writing with a sweep of his foot, Rhesus turned down the narrow way, and with Pelak behind, passed into the chamber underground.

It was tolerably light now, and Rhesus saw in a glance that the barrier stone had been removed and placed against the wall. With the help of Pelak he raised the lower slab feverishly. There was no one on the dark, slimy stairway; no sign of anyone. Rhesus went down a little way and shouted into the blackness with all the strength of his lungs. There came no response.—(*To be continued.*)

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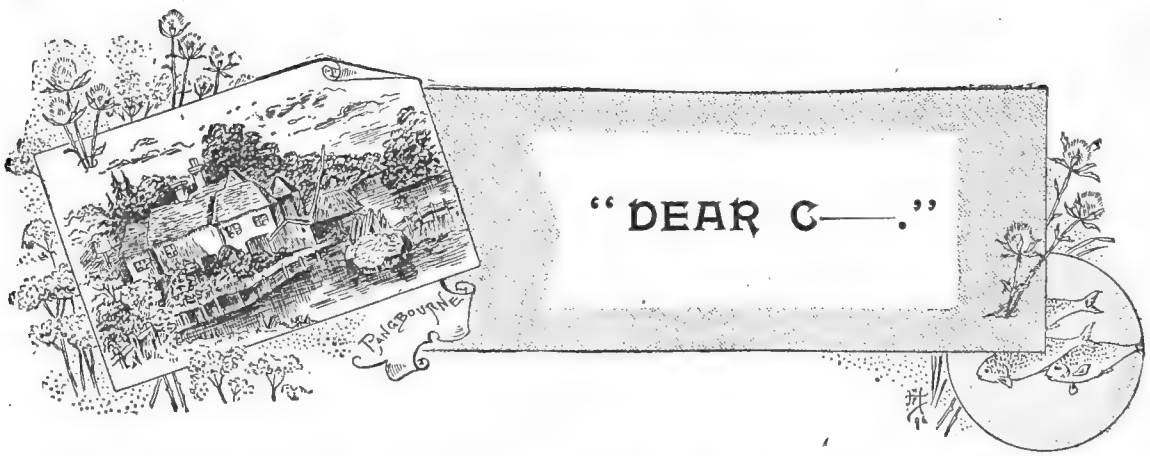

DEAR C.—Meet me at the "Cyclist's Rest" at 5.45 to-morrow. We can talk the matter over on our bikes.

Very affectionately.

ELSA.

Charles Tracey sat on an office stool and turned this little note in his fingers at the same time that he turned its import over in his mind. The junior clerk who sat near him could not resist an inquisitive impulse to look at Mr. Tracey's face, and he saw that Mr. Tracey was smiling satisfaction at himself; also, he saw that the little piece of paper was a feminine note, and he drew conclusions.

Tracey took another dive into the four lines of very modern feminine handwriting to refresh his memory as to the wording, and then he meditated again. It was, no doubt, an original way of answering his rather old-fashioned proposal, but her originality was always one of Elsa's great charms to this devoted lover. The idea of meeting a girl at a club house on purpose to discuss a proposal of marriage with her while taking a spin!

And then there was something so sensible in the phrase "talk the matter over." Elsa really was a very sensible girl—so sensible as to be all the more piquant for this quite extraordinary good sense of hers.

So Tracey smiled as he sat at his desk. Then he looked at his watch and resolved to go and have lunch. He put the watch into his waistcoat pocket, folded the little note, and looked for the envelope, from which he had somewhat precipitately torn it when Elsa's brother had put it into his hand a quarter of an hour before. There it was, a pink little envelope.

The clerk next to Mr. Tracey at this point indulged his curiosity once more. He saw Mr. Tracey look with a tender smile at the envelope; then he saw the smile fade, and observed that Mr. Tracey had turned pale.

Then Tracey took up the envelope and the note and reached for his straw hat. He walked out of the bank gazing at the address on the envelope, which was: "Miss Clara Henderson."

This inference was plain. That young brother of Elsa's—young Harry—had had two notes to deliver. He was, in his own conceit, a born messenger, and it delighted him to ride his cycle all over the city, leaving notes and messages. If there had been no note for Tracey the boy would not have stopped at the bank at all.

The wretched urchin had no doubt whirled into the Henderson home, as he had whirled into the bank, dashed down his (Tracey's) fate-fraught letter with a curt "Letter for Miss Clara. No answer," and then sped away to chalk up his last record in letter-carrying.

He ate no lunch worth mentioning, but sat and felt cold chills running about all over him. He knew Clara Henderson so well. If it had been anyone else but that feather-brained——

That afternoon a ring at the door bell of the Davis residence was soon followed by a sound as if half a hurricane had suddenly been let into the front hall. The rushing was mingled with laughter.

"Oh, I must see Miss Elsa. Tell her I'm coming up to her room."

In less than one minute Clara was at her friend's door, standing behind the servant who was supposed to be delivering her message.

"Elsa! Won't you let me in? I'm in a tremendous hurry, dear——"

"I'm so glad to see you, Clara. Couldn't you go to-morrow?"

"Go? Go where? Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha! Elsa, don't be very angry. It wasn't my fault. I'm awfully sorry. Young Harry brought this for me, and it was meant for—for Mr. Tracey. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Clara! Did you open it?"

For answer, Clara held out a bulky packet, the flap of the envelope torn.

"I give you my word of honour, Elsa, I only read as far as, 'man can confer on a woman.' Then I nearly had a fit."

Elsa's face was a bright scarlet, but she retained her self-command. Clara saw that she was much upset, however.

"Don't you think you'd better put the letter in a fresh envelope and send it to him?" Clara asked, becoming very serious.

"My dear Clara," said Elsa, "I shall never speak to him again."

"Oh, don't say that, Elsa! Why won't you?"

"I shall never have a chance. I know that man too well. And you, of all people."

"Why me, of all people?"

"He's positively afraid of you. He thinks you the most formidable tease on earth, and he can't stand teasing."

"Then what do you think he'll do?"

"My own private belief," said Elsa, speaking very

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deliberately, "is that he will pack up and go to South Africa without saying a word to anybody."

The catch in her friend's voice as she spoke these last words brought a most unusually serious look to Clara Henderson's habitually joyous face.

"Elsa," she said, "give me that letter."

"What are you going to do with it? No, I can't, Clara. It will look like running after the man."

"Well, then, I'm off."

"What are you going to do?"

"I want my letter."

"Your letter?"

"Yes. You must have sent me some letter, or young Harry wouldn't have brought me Mr. Tracey's."

"But it doesn't matter. I can tell you now you're here. It was to meet me, about that picnic, you know."

"Never mind," said Clara. "I'm going to have my letter."

And she whirled away.

"Mr. Tracey," said the junior clerk, who was becoming really uneasy by this time, "a lady wishes to see you."

"Tell the lady I'm very busy."

The young clerk stared at what seemed to him the obvious untruth of the allegation, but nevertheless he took the message.

"Mr. Tracey, the lady says she has some very important business to settle with you, and will you please speak to her for two minutes."

"Who is the lady?"

"I know her face, but she didn't give me her name. She wears a brown velveteen dress."

"Fair hair done up in a coil?"

The young clerk nodded.

"Mr. Edwards," said Tracey, "I don't think I'm very well to-day."

"I noticed that you weren't looking well before you went to lunch."

"Mr. Edwards, I think I'll go home for to-day. My cycle is in the back corridor, I think. Please tell Mr. Glinn I'll be all right to-morrow."

He was speeding away on his machine a second later. He had been riding about ten minutes, and fancied that he was safe, when he heard a voice behind him that made him start.

"You must be very busy to-day, Mr. Tracey," a clear voice called aloud, "and very ill. Do you always ride like this when you are very busy—and ill?"

Physically, Tracey kept his balance, only turning to raise his hat; morally, he collapsed.

"Oh, Miss Henderson," he said, "how do you do? No, I'm not feeling very well to-day."

"Still, you're not ill enough to be in bed, are you? I should like to speak to you, if you don't mind, just for a minute. You have a letter of mine, I believe."

All this conversation was going on as they cycled side by side in a suburban thoroughfare.

"I? Oh, yes. I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to read it."

"That's of no consequence," said Clara. "But please give it to me. I want to see what Elsa says——"

"Hi! Hi!" came from behind the two. "I say! Can't you go when you are full on, Mr. Tracey!"

It was young Harry.

"Sister says I gave you the wrong letter, so I brought you this when I had done oiling up my machine."

Young Harry held out a letter to Tracey.

All three with one accord dismounted by the roadside.

"Please give me my letter," said Clara.

And Tracey, with smiles and nervous apologies, produced Elsa's little note from an inside pocket.

"Will you allow me?" he asked, as he took his own letter from Harry.

Clara nodded and turned her attention to her own little note. Harry stood wide-eyed while these two read.

"Sister changed her mind after you went, Miss Clara," he said.

It took Tracey a long time to even glance through his three sheets of upright caligraphy. Clara displayed the patience and self-restraint of a waiting angel.

At last she said. "Now it wasn't so very dreadful, after all, was it, Mr. Tracey?"

"Oh, no," said he. "Not at all. Harry, please tell your sister for me that I'll be round this evening."

"No," said Clara. "You hurry on home and tell your sister that I've caught Mr. Tracey and I'm going to bring him with me now." Then as Harry flew down a side street by way of making a short cut, she turned to Tracey and asked: "How do you feel now? Better?"

"Thanks," said Tracey. "I feel decidedly better now."

W. Williams.

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AN INVOLUNTARY ACCOMPLICE.

We were a party of Government surveyors of the British provinces now known as the Dominion of Canada, then under the governorship of Sir John Harvey.

Halifax had been our starting point, my brother, Captain Perry, being the leader of the surveying party which was to be the *avant-coureur* of the first railroad in the province of Nova Scotia. We were to startle the wild fowl in their greenwood, and do away with the usefulness of the stage coach for ever.

I had inflicted my presence on the party with a very scant show of welcome, even my favourite brother declaring that a woman would be dreadfully in the way. But I promised to take no luggage, to stop for an indefinite time whenever it pleased them to drop me by the way, and to ride rough shod with the rest of the party.

There were two others smuggled in who had no right to be there. One was an old army friend of Richard's, a subaltern from the Eighteenth Regiment of West India Hussars, and the other a college youth who was in bad health and wanted exercise.

We had been out a couple of weeks, when one night we rode into a camp of Indians and learnt that we were about eighteen or twenty miles from the nearest tavern, which was on the road to the next town, a pretty place named Truro.

We set off, but it was nearly eleven o'clock when we reached the little wooden inn called "The Queen's Arms." It was all lighted up, and we found there were two reasons for this. One was that the landlord was ill, and the other was the entertainment of a party of hunters, one of whom was Frank Harvey, Sir John's wild son.

We hastened to pay our respects to him and his party as they were just leaving. They had killed a fine bear the night before, on the very road over which we had just passed, and had dined off fresh bear steak.

They rode away and we entered the inn and ordered supper, which was served after some waiting.

As soon as we had finished, the men followed Richard to the bar-room, there to smoke their pipes and drink a modicum of spirits, and I went upstairs to the room allotted to me. I was quite ready to retire, being conscious of a pleasurable sense of fatigue. But before I could reach my room the most inexplicable circumstance of my life happened.

There was a dim lamp burning on a table in the passage, evidently left there to light my way upstairs, and on the upper landing the light shone from an open door, which was possibly intended for the same purpose.

As I passed, the most piercing groans, cries, and blasphemous execrations issued from this room. What impelled me to stop, and finally to enter and offer the sick man, for it was he, my assistance, I can never know. Enough that I did so, and never ceased to regret it.

"Marie! Marie!" he was calling fiercely between oaths and cries; "Oh, Heaven, I die! I die! and nobody will help me! Oh, Marie! Maledictions on her!"

"Can I help you? Shall I call some one?" I asked, stepping just inside the door where the sick man could see me. "Are you in great pain?"

He looked at me with such a wolfish glare that I retreated a step towards the door.

Then he said fiercely:

"I know you not, but give me quick the bottle—no, no, that one on the shelf. Ah, mees, thanks—you are good!"

For I had hurriedly crossed the room, seized the bottle which he pointed out and handed it to him.

He was certainly a pitiable object. His head was wrapped in white linen bandages, and this, added to his

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ghastly pallor, made him look as if already dead. He was emaciated, and the lower part of his face was covered with a stubby growth of beard. As I gave him the bottle he said woefully:

"They let me here lie and nobody come! Oh, I so ell! An' they glad me die—she, the wretch—Marie."

I got out of the room as quickly as possible. The fact was that I knew nothing at all of sickness and had been brought up with habits of prompt obedience. Had he commanded me to find Marie for him I should have gone at once. I concluded that she was his wife, but I had seen no other woman than the slattern who set the table. Not knowing what whim he might take next, I hurried abruptly away and locked myself in my own room.

The room was filled with sunlight when I was awakened by my brother's knock.

"Hurry your dressing," he called in a low voice; "we must ride to Truro for breakfast."

"I will be ready," I returned, wondering why we were not to breakfast where we had supped.

When I came down ready for the saddle, I noticed that the door of the sick room was closed. I saw men talking in groups and everybody looked serious.

"What has happened, Richard?" I asked.

"The landlord is dead."

I was not surprised. He had looked very bad, but I felt a shudder at the thought that I had seen him, and that the great mystery had come so near me while I slept.

I did not tell my brother of the service I had rendered the sick man. I do not know why, for it was on the tip of my tongue. It might have been that I had a vague idea that he would not have approved of it. But as soon as we were off I asked if the man had died suddenly.

"He killed himself," was the answer.

"What! Impossible! How could a man so ill as he was manage to kill himself?" I asked, astonished.

"It seems that he was left alone," said the subaltern; "his wife was at the bar—a pretty wench, on my soul. There was a fellow hulking round that was sweet on her, and the sick man, who hadn't set his foot on the floor for six weeks, got up and took a bottle of laudanum off a shelf in the room and drank it every drop."

My brother must have seen my lips whitening, for he said sternly:

"There! No hysterics. We've had enough of the fellow. Let's talk of more cheerful subjects."

And he touched his own horse and mine with the whip, and we went off at a hard gallop and further talk was impossible.

Oh, the misery that I suffered in silence and alone, for I could not tell Richard of that fatal visit, that it was I who put the weapon of death into the man's nerveless hand, that in my blind stupidity I had not looked at the bottle, or even stopped to give the sick man the medicine, as a child might have done. Oh, the anguish that my ignorance cost me then, and long after, until I was satisfied in my own mind that the poor wretch had only anticipated death by a few hours.

It will be supposed that this was the end of the affair, but the most tragic part was yet to come.

My brother made a trip into a depth of woods by a circuitous route, and on this occasion I waited for him at a farm-house a day and night. At the close of the second day—it was the third one following the event I have just related—he joined me and we rode down the hills, intending to take the main road and return to Truro.

It was a dark, moonless night. I was in depressed spirits, and as the rest of the party talked and laughed or sang songs, I became more and more gloomy, thinking of the strange share I had taken in that man's death, which seemed as real to me as if I had voluntarily poisoned him.

We were descending a long hill, and as we neared the bottom we saw lights gleaming and heard voices. Then we saw a company of men carrying something between them. As they monopolised the road, my brother called a halt, and we waited to see who or what they were. Then we saw that they were carrying a rude coffin and that some of them were digging a grave.

"It must be a murder," said the subaltern, in a whisper, that no word might attract their attention.

It was certainly a weird performance, and I became so interested that I forgot to be frightened. The lights moving about looked fantastic; the dark figures of the men, outlined distinct and clear against the dark forest; that long, fearful box on the greensward—all looked like the moving spectacle of a dream.

It was soon over, and I expected that the men would go. But no. A sapling that grew near was cut down and the men began to shape one end of it.

"They intend to mark the spot, I declare," said the subaltern.

"Be quiet," said Richard, lifting a warning finger as our men pressed impatiently forward. Those men must have known that we were there, for several times our horses had neighed impatiently, but they took no notice of us, and there was something in that unusual and lawless proceeding that few would care to intrude upon.

Suddenly Richard said aloud: "I understand it all now."

"What is it? Who are they burying?" I asked.

"Wait," said my brother; "they will soon be gone, then I will tell you."

One man now took the sapling, which was shaped into a stake with one sharp end, and held it in what seemed to be the centre of that spot of new-made earth. Now the other one gave it a great blow. This he followed up by a second and a third. Then a fearful sound of rending wood was heard.

"Begorra, they've driven it straight through the body!" said the subaltern in a horror-stricken voice.

"It's an old custom; I've seen it before this," spoke up one of the men. "Did ye naught hear tell, captain, of buryin' a man that kills himself at the cross roads at the dark of the moon and drivin' of a stake through his heart?"

"I know!" exclaimed the subaltern suddenly; "it's that fellow of the 'Queen's Arms.' I never suspected it till now."

"Yes," said Richard. "I guessed as much. But I thought that barbarous practice had died out. Who knows that the poor wretch intended to kill himself? He may have only tried to ease his pain."

I clung to the warm neck of my horse and held myself together with a desperate clutch. The scene would have been frightful under any circumstances, but at that hour, and to me with my horrible secret, it was a ghastly picture. To add to its grotesque horror I heard the man who had explained the custom singing some horrible verses in an undertone to the college lad, every line of which burnt into my memory.

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As this dismal ceremony ended, Richard spoke to me.

"I remember hearing of this old custom," he said, "but never expected to see it. Are you shivering? It is a rough spectacle, isn't it? I expect, little woman, you wish you had stayed at home."

Ah, did I not wish it? But assuming a bravado I did not feel, I assured him that I was all right, and began to prepare myself for another ordeal, that of passing the new-made grave which lay directly in our route.

The men were gone now, and their lantern lights were grown pale in the shadows as they hurried away from their dismal work. When they were gone we started up our horses, which were restless and impatient to be off. I braced myself for a final effort. I must pass that accursed spot.

We galloped down the rest of the hill, and at the foot, Kitty, my sure-footed, dauntless mare, was seized with a fit of trembling, and stopped so suddenly she nearly threw me over her head. I kept my seat with difficulty, and as no one had noticed me they went on without me, and I was left alone by the side, the very edge of that awful spot.

My heart seemed to melt within me.

"*Grâce à Dieu!*" I called out in the extremity of terror.

A provincial malediction turned to a blessing on my lips. The mare ceased to tremble, and gathering her limbs she made one mighty leap that carried me into the midst of the party, which had not missed me.

It all happened many years ago, and until now I have kept my own counsel, and I leave it to intelligent readers to judge if I was not an innocent and unconcious accessory to a crime.

M. Carter.

A Little Heroine.

It was sunset in Santa Rosalia. The rainy season was on in Cuba, and low, rumbling thunder had been heard all the afternoon. That is, the people who lived in the little cluster of palm-thatched houses called Santa Rosalia thought it was thunder. And so it was—the distant roar of Spanish artillery that came up from the south.

One little cottage stood by the road-side, some distance apart from the others. It was the home of the Lazcanos.

The father, José, was dead. He had fallen a victim to the last, the "Ten Years'" War. Three sons were left to carry on the fight, and they were then with Brigadier Lopez Recio.

Only the mother and Maria, the sister, a little girl of twelve years, were left at home to watch and pray to God to aid the Cubans in their struggle for liberty.

Suddenly the noise of clattering hoofs came from the south-west. The still night air bore the unmistakable sound with distinctness. In an instant every head was at the open door.

Nearer and nearer came the galloping rider. He was alone. His horse was covered with foam, and panting like a tired hound. Up to the little gate of the Lazcano cottage he staggered, and then his rider reeled and almost fell into the arms of his mother.

"Merciful Heaven! Enrique, you are wounded, my boy——"

"It is no matter; I can still ride. The battle of Saratoga is raging. I am on my way to Colonel Pena. He does not know of it. We need him and his cavalry. Help me to a fresh horse and I'll catch Pena at Santa Lucia to-night. I must—"

The poor fellow never finished the sentence. He had fainted. The arms of tender women bore him into the house.

Poor little Maria followed, the tears streaming from her eyes. She watched them draw off the riding boots filled with her brother's blood. She brought water to moisten his parched lips. She saw the ugly wound in his hip and murmured through her gritting teeth:

"Bad Spaniards! Bad Spaniards! They will kill us all yet!"

And then her brother's eyes opened. The cold water had revived him. He tried to move, but only groaned in agony. Once more he strove to rise.

"Mother, some one, help me to my feet. I must go on—I must go on. I have ridden many miles since morning. There are only ten more to Santa Lucia and to Pena. We must have him."

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And with a mighty effort he rose to his feet. Then he wavered, tears of helplessness came into his eyes, and he sank back on the bed with a sob of anguish.

"To think that I should go so near to the end of my journey and then fail!"

"How were you wounded, my boy?"

"'Twas near El Desmayo—late this afternoon. I had changed horses at La Vinda an hour before. Suddenly I ran into a body of Spanish guerrillas from San Miguel. I could not fight them, there were too many, so I took up a ravine towards Isidro. They fired five volleys after me and gave chase. They knew I was on an important mission.

"My horse was fleet and strong and I got away, but carried with me one of their rifle balls. I tore off parts of my sleeve and roughly bound up the wound, but it still bled. I'm better now; I'm rested! I'll go on."

And again he tried to get on his feet.

"Enrique, my boy, it is impossible, you are weak. You cannot ride; the motion of the horse will cause you to bleed to death. Guido must go. Maria, tell him to saddle a fresh horse and get ready to ride to Santa Lucia."

Maria started towards the door, but her brother raised his hand in protest.

"Guido is only half-witted. He might start for Santa Lucia, but he would never find his way in the dark. Even if he reached the place he would forget whom he wanted to see."

"But there is no other in Rosalia," pleaded the mother.

"True! Therefore, I must go, wound or no wound. Maria, tell Guido to saddle a horse and bring it to the gate quickly. We are losing time."

"Brother, we can't let you go. I'll never see you again," and the poor child buried her head on her brother's neck. Then, suddenly rising, she exclaimed:

"Oh, why was I not a man? Cuba so needs men! Yes, I'll tell him to get the horse ready at once. Colonel Pena must go to help Gomez."

Turning, she kissed her brother's forehead and hurried out to the stables. Soon the quick gallop of a horse was heard approaching the house. But it did not stop at the gate. On it sped in the direction of Santa Lucia.

A moment later Guido, the half-witted black boy, wandered aimlessly into the room.

"Where is the horse, where is Maria?" inquired her brother.

"Gone!" replied the boy.

"Gone! Where?" exclaimed everyone in the room.

"I don't know. She said something about Santa Lucia, jumped on the horse's back, and it seems to me she's gone."

And so she was; the brave little girl, although not a soldier of Cuba, had taken her brother's place. She had gone to Pena, to tell him that the fight between Gomez and the Spanish general Castellens was raging at Saratoga, and that every Cuban in Camaguey was needed.

On the little heroine rode, in the darkness of the night. She had been born and brought up in the country, and she knew the way to Santa Lucia, although she had never before travelled in the dark. But she was riding to save Cuba. Darkness, danger, nothing daunted her. Bareheaded and alone, she urged her horse over the road at a pace which would have made most girls tremble with fear.

Not even when the tropical storm broke in all its fury about her did she hesitate. Lightning striking the tall "palma reals" made the horse shy many times and almost bolt along the road, but the brave little rider held on and never loosened rein until in sight of Pena's camp-fires.

"Who goes there?" suddenly called out the picket.

"Cuba!" answered the brave little patriot. She reined up her panting steed.

"Advance!" ordered the guard, and Maria, pale wet and dripping, rode forward.

"*Caramba!* It is a child. Who are you? What do you want?"

"I am Maria Lazcano. I want to tell Colonel Pena that there is a battle at Saratoga. General Gomez has only 530 men against over 2,000 Spaniards, and he needs help."

A few minutes later, almost fainting with fatigue and nervous strain, she was borne to the presence of Pena.

"*Dios mio!*" he exclaimed, as he listened to her story, and then gave the signal for his command to mount.

"You poor little thing, you should be in bed and asleep."

Wrapping his coat round her little, trembling, wet form, he sprang into his saddle and had an officer pass the child up to him. The order was given to march, and in his arms the fighting colonel of Camaguey carried the little heroine back to her home in Rosalia.

"Take her," he said, as he handed her over to her half-crazed mother. "She brought us the news. I'll speak of her to General Gomez. She deserves the rank of a major-general. She has saved her brother's life, and her brave deed may win the day at Saratoga."

LEONARD LEWIS.

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BETWEEN TWO STOOLS.

"This," said Mrs. Brierly, "this is the last time, Martha Wilkin, the very last time. I've spent enough upon you since your mother died, and I took charge of you, to marry six girls who had their senses about them. I've dressed you and I've let you go into company, and here you are, four-and-twenty, and not so much as engaged.

"It's perfectly annoying, and what I have to say is, if you don't settle your affairs this summer I'll give you no more chances. I expect to die in the workhouse as it is. Why, I was married at seventeen and your mother at eighteen! What's the use of advantages—and you have looks, Martha—if you don't make use of them?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you expect me to do. I can't very well propose to anyone," said poor Martha, ready to cry. "I do everything I can, and they make love to me, and they say all sorts of things. If they don't pop the question, how can I make them? There now, I suppose you waited until Uncle Brierly asked you to have him before you said you would?"

"Your uncle would have committed suicide if I had refused him," said Mrs. Brierly. "You may not believe it now, but I was a beauty in my youth. As for what you can do, you ought to know; but what I say is this: Come home engaged or I stop all this useless extravagance!"

With which speech she inflicted on her niece's cheek a lukewarm kiss, and bade her good-bye.

Aunt Brierly was a good business woman, and would not be likely to spend any more money on an unsaleable article, and Martha shivered at the prospect before her, if this summer's campaign should prove a failure.

On the whole she looked so ill when she arrived at Blackpool that her mirror told her that her best plan would be to retire early and take as much beauty sleep as possible, in view of any eligible gentlemen who might put in an appearance next day.

Fresh as a rose and dressed in her most becoming morning dress, Martha took her seat at the breakfast table next morning, and nestled close to Mrs. Newman, her relative and chaperon, in the most bewitching manner.

That lady, an ample matron with a loud voice, greeted her affectionately, and at once introduced her to two gentlemen who were her neighbours.

"Mr. Holt, Miss Wilkin; Miss Wilkin, Mr. Downhill. All old friends of mine. Charmed to make you acquainted with each other," and then devoted herself to breakfast, and left those who preferred it to waste time on conversation.

And so Miss Wilkin, having the field to herself, made eyes at both her new acquaintances, and shrewdly noted, amid her infantile gigglings, that both were smitten.

They were of the age, or rather of the ages, at which the heart is most susceptible to Cupid's arrows. Edmund Holt was a youth of twenty, and James Downhill was at least sixty-five.

Never before had young Mr. Holt had such bewitching attention offered him. And as for old Mr. Downhill, his memory brought back some dove-like glances, such as those Miss Wilkin showered upon him, from the long-vanished years of his youth.

To cut a long story short, Miss Wilkin, having discovered that Mr. Holt was very rich and an orphan, and that Mr. Downhill was a very wealthy bachelor, at once set her cap for both gentlemen, resolving to accept the one who proposed first. She loved neither.

A girl of her views, who had made a rush into the matrimonial market with but one stipulation—that the man she married should have money—was scarcely likely to have a heart. A husband meant to her easy circumstances, freedom from her Aunt Brierly's incessant "nagging," liberty to flirt as much as she chose with ineligibles, who were often very interesting, and freedom from the dread of being an old maid.

Mrs. Newman, who was, on the whole, a good-natured woman, willing to see her friends well settled, furthered the little affair to the best of her ability. There were walks, rides, drives, chatting in cosy corners, and at last a proposal.

It came from Mr. Holt. Youth is hasty. Age is slow. Mr. Downhill was just making up his mind to do it, when Mr. Holt did it. And Miss Wilkin said "yes," and would have fallen into his arms but that they were in full sight of an old lady who had just directed her opera glass full at them from a window.

"Yes," Martha had answered, and young Holt blushed rosy red.

And afterwards, when they had had dinner, Martha locked herself in her room and wrote to her Aunt Brierly. Her letter ended thus:

"So you see I'm engaged, and you can't tease me any longer. I don't suppose poor Holt will ever set the river on fire, but he's a good-natured fellow, and I can twist him round my finger."

Mrs. Brierly signified her approval by return of post and Martha's mind was at rest. It did not trouble her much that in less than a week a telegram summoned Holt to town. She could use the fast-fading days of freedom better without an engaged lover at her side, and she certainly made the most of them.

She plunged into flirtation in a way that frightened even Mrs. Newman, and was happier than she had ever been since her search for a husband commenced. As for poor Mr. Downhill, she quite snubbed him, now that she had no views concerning him.

Meanwhile the absent Holt wrote love letters, and she answered them.

Poor Martha! Life is certainly full of ups and downs.

One morning Mrs. Newman opened a London paper and, having glanced down the column of marriages and deaths, gave a faint shriek and looked at Martha in a terrified way. The latter snatched the paper and saw this:

"Suddenly, on the 9th, Edmund Holt."

Edmund Holt—there was no doubt of it. Mrs. Newman looked at Martha expecting to see her faint. To her surprise, the young lady, though very serious, was quite calm.

"Poor fellow," she said; "I'm very sorry. Do be

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quiet, dear Mrs. Newman! Don't let's have a scene. No one knows we were engaged, and you need not tell them. I don't want my season spoilt."

Then she rose and went to her room, cried a little,

His memory brought back some dove-like glances such as those Miss Wilkin showered upon him.

bathed her face, and went downstairs to charm Mr. Downhill by beaming upon him and asking him how he could be so dreadful and neglect her so.

In a word, now that the old love was gone, she "took up with the new," and in a week Mr. Downhill had proposed and was accepted.

And the estimable Mrs. Brierly received an account of the situation which greatly surprised her.

Old Mr. Downhill was rather more obstinate than ever Mr. Holt had been. He asserted his rights, and insisted upon the open wearing of the engagement ring.

There was no more flirtation for Miss Wilkin, and everyone knew what had occurred. She wore a valuable diamond ring on her finger, and was guarded by her old beau from morning until night. He even wrote her several notes between their parting at night and meeting at nine in the morning, and in one of them he referred to her flirtation with young Holt.

Miss Wilkin was one of those unlucky victims to love of letter writing who can never resist putting things down in black and white. She wrote this sentence in her reply:

"You naughty, naughty goose! How could I care for a stripling like that? Poor fellow! he was very nice; but only a boy, you know."

And when she had written it she thought how much jollier it was to run about with him than to sit in a corner with old Mr. Downhill, who was always afraid of catching cold, and who would not let her dance because he could not. Still he was rich, and she was engaged at last.

One evening she strolled down the parade with her betrothed, leaning on his arm in the most confiding manner. The evening train was in, and people were waiting for the newcomers.

As the vehicles rattled past someone was seen waving a white handkerchief. A young man with very red cheeks—and then someone called out:

"Why it's Holt, alive and well!"

As the fly pulled up and he sprang out of the vehicle, they rushed toward him to shake hands and tell him that he had been supposed dead.

"Death in the paper, you know, old fellah," said one exquisite. "Weally vewy cuyous how death could be in the papaw when you weren't dead, you know."

"It was poor grandfather. I was named after him, you know. I never thought what people would think. I——"

Then he turned pale, fearing that the awful news had killed his poor Martha.

Miss Wilkin had seen him and had dragged Downhill away; she was really quite faint.

Downhill hurried her back to the house, not quite knowing what was wrong, for he had not noticed Holt. At her own request he left her alone in the drawing-room; she knew what must come.

A few minutes later Holt rushed in.

"My darling!" he exclaimed. "Did you think I was dead?"

"Yes—I—did!" gasped Martha.

He bent over her and caught her hands and pressed them to his lips.

"Oh, I couldn't die and leave you," he said. "I——"

But here a hand came down upon his shoulder and a thin voice breathed in his ear:

"Young man, I am very glad to see you restored, as it were, from the grave, but I can't allow such liberties with the lady who is going to marry me."

Mr. Downhill had returned unexpectedly.

Martha, not knowing what to do, took refuge in tears and silence. The gentlemen grew furious, and finally walked away with each other, with "pistols for two and coffee for four" in their faces.

But this was eighteen hundred and ninety-seven, and much is thought of documentary evidence. In a retired spot, where they could not be overheard, the hapless Martha's letters were produced. Poor little Holt read with the bitter agony of youth the woman's denial of her love for and engagement with him, written a week after his supposed death, and old Downhill gave a groan over another buried hope, as he read some lines written to Holt, in which he was set down as a superannuated creature only taken notice of out of pity.

After this the two gentlemen shook hands. They had no quarrel with each other, now. Neither of them wanted to marry Martha Wilkin. She received two little notes that evening telling her so.

That was last summer. This year Martha is not going away for a holiday.

Mrs. Brierly having dismissed her housemaid, for reasons that were clearly her own, it is a matter of wonder to the neighbours who the person who now cleans the windows can be.

It is barely possible that this is Martha. Mrs. Brierly is a woman of her word, and she considers her niece's chance of matrimony quite over.

Daisy Godwin.

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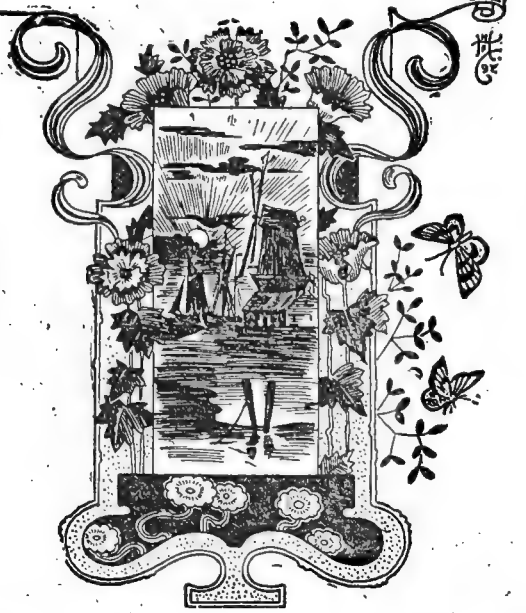
HIS OWN STORY.



"Hallo, Marsden! I declare I didn't see you!"

Vickery had stumbled upon an elderly man seated in an arm-chair at the farthest window of the club room, which he had thought was empty.

"Who is it?" asked Marsden lazily. "Oh, how do, Vick? Where've *you* fallen from? Come, sit down and have some of this. It's innocent—claret and vichy. I say, isn't it hot!"

"As it happens," said Vickery, dropping into the seat on the other side of the small table, "you're the very man I wanted to see. I want to ask your help on behalf of a young fellow who——"

"Ah!"

The elderly man put down the glass that had been at his lips; and the interruption seemed a little peevish. With singular inappositeness he went on in a drawling voice:

"I was just thinking when you came up, Vick. Something I don't often do this sort of weather. I've been watching two beggars—one blind, the other lame. They've picked up some money from charitable people, but I believe they are frauds."

Vickery bridled a trifle.

"You misunderstand me," he said, "if you think I am asking you for pecuniary assistance. Nothing of the kind."

The elderly man smiled, and Vickery continued: "I've a reason for asking your assistance—your influence. Would you—er—is it too hot for you to listen to a little story? I'm going round presently to see this young man, and——"

"You want candour, Vick? Of course. Well, to be absolutely truthful, stories, and especially little ones, send me to sleep. You won't mind? Yes, I'd like to hear it."

Vickery looked annoyed as he leant back.

"Oh, it doesn't amount to anything," he said carelessly. "It wouldn't interest you."

Marsden leant forward; and there was light enough to show that his face had grown suddenly sober.

"Vickery," he said, "you misunderstand me. There's nobody in the world more serious than I am at all times. If it's beneath the surface, I'm only glad that I hide it so well. I'm not a very old man, Vickery; to be explicit, I'm fifty-seven; but I've had—oh—troubles that make me feel seventy. Some time, if you care to hear, I'll tell you *my* story—though Heaven knows it's one I've no reason for wishing to tell. No, my friend, you don't know me—nobody does; and if I'm commonly jovial and careless, it's because I hate to be otherwise, and have a terror of being a wet blanket." Brightening all at once, he added: "Come, the story."

Vickery lighted his cigar procrastinatingly.

"If you really care to hear it," he began slowly, "I'll make it short. I'm much interested in the young man, and I knew you could do so much if you would.

"This young fellow is ill and poor, and out of work, and that sort of thing; and that's the reason I'm down here. Miller his name is—or, rather, that's what he call's himself; there's reason for believing it assumed, as you'll see presently. Anyhow, he's the son of a rich father, a college man, and has been well brought up.

"Well, while he was at college, he was taken with typhoid and brought home. For several weeks he lay next door to death, then, at the crisis, took a sudden turn for the better and got well. So far so good.

"During his illness a trained nurse had been engaged for him. He believes that her extraordinary care pulled him through. What he believes is, of course, only of moment in the light of subsequent events. The upshot of it was that no sooner did he get out of bed than he married her—secretly. You've heard of that sort of thing before, eh?

"Well, of course it's quite in order to put more than half the blame—if blame there is—on the woman. It's quite possible to bring in her undue influence, her insinuation into his affections, and so on. I believe it's generally done, but in this particular case I happen to know it was otherwise.

"That part of it is immaterial, however; the point is, they got married. And when the family heard of it there was a pretty state of affairs. No sensible man would blame them for feeling cut up about it, when he was an only son and there were daughters; but young

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Miller—he was barely twenty, I believe—young Miller, boyishly, did not take kindly to the things that were said, and he and his father quarrelled. If I conjecture rightly, the old man ordered him out of the house. At any rate, there was a bother.

"The young woman he married, mind you, was about as well born and well educated as his own sisters; I can venture that because I know her. She was very young, too, but she was sensible. When she realised what the marriage had cost him, she was also self-sacrificing enough to want him to leave her and return to his family.

"And that's one thing I like about the boy. I'm not sure the words were used, of course, but I can very well imagine him to have said: 'I live or die with my wife.' H'm—on second thought, he wouldn't have been so theatrical, but in any case that's what he meant.

"Well, the young pair, with perhaps money enough in hand to keep them a month, got a little furnished room in some out-of-the-way region of the East-end and began housekeeping. The wife could have earned pretty fair wages, probably, and the young man little or nothing. One was practical, the other had a rudimentary education in the classics, which was for the moment a burden to him. But of course he could not let his wife work. The consequence was that in a very short time they were nearly starving.

"You see, so far, everything was going on quite like a book. Starvation came nearer. What with low diet, or no diet, and fruitless wandering about the streets in search of employment, young Miller was soon in bed again. Affairs were now at a grand crisis. Here was a sick husband in the house, no money, no friends, nothing. What was to be done?

"If it were still going on like the book there would have been a providential visitation of the family, eager for reconciliation, a few tears and other properties, and the curtain would have fallen happily. Or, perhaps, the girl wife would have gone to the obdurate parents—obdurate's the word, isn't it?—on her knees, and accomplished a like result by the force of her beauty. But nothing of the kind happened.

"What was to be done? Well, sir, that girl knew. She had to nurse her husband, you see, and she had to make some money. The doing of one or the other would have been nothing to her, but she had to do both. Without hesitating a moment she had her husband taken to a private hospital, where she was known, and obtained a nurse's place in the same establishment, her services being accepted as payment for her husband's maintenance.

"It was for several weeks. Then, as soon as he was able to be out again, young Miller began to fret about his wife's working—she had retained her place, you understand. But what else was there to do? The girl was sensible, of course, and the boy was sensible, too, only it cut him deep to let things go on that way. And at last he got a place. Yes, as a messenger and porter! But the pay was dreadful!

"But I managed to get him a situation with a friend of mine, where he earned thirty-five shillings a week, and he insisted that his wife should give up her work. But she said she wouldn't; they could begin to put something by in the bank, she said. And for six months or so she didn't give up. Then she had to."

Vickery paused to strike a match to re-light his cigar. By the flickering blaze he saw that his friend lay back in his chair, with closed eyes. He asked contritely:

"Do I bore you, Marsden?"

"Not at all, Vick. Quite—ah—quite interested."

"Well, as I was saying—the baby. That, of course, settled the question. The girl had to give up her place. They had saved a little money, and everything was going along smoothly. They were happy and contented.

"But one day little Mrs. Miller—pretty little thing, too! blue eyes, yellow hair, peachy cheeks—well, little Mrs. Miller came in to see me. She knew I'd done something for her husband. I can remember her visit just as if it were yesterday. Her big blue eyes wore a wondering look, and her face was whiter than your handkerchief.

"'Pardon me,' said the little woman, 'but I was just passing by, and I thought I'd call to see if you could tell me where I can find my husband—at—at this time of day.' (She stammered like that.) 'I know so little about the city,' she said. Do you see, she was 'just passing by'—eh?

"I looked at her a moment, surprised, I dare say, and asked if he wasn't at the place where he worked. She looked past me, and said she'd just been there, and he wasn't in.

"'Sit down a minute, Mrs. Miller,' I said; 'I want to talk to you.' I began to suspect something wrong, you see. She sat down, and looked at me steadily with those big eyes.

"'Mrs. Miller,' I said—I felt there was no use beating about the bush—'you haven't seen your husband this morning?'

"She merely looked frightened, and gave a little gasp.

"'He didn't come home last night?' I went on probing as gently as I could.

"Without answering directly, she cried: 'Oh, do you think anything could have happened to him?'

"The whole thing was clear as daylight. I knew in one instant exactly what had happened: young Miller

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had fought it out as long as he could, had been approached by his relatives, and had deserted his wife.

"The conclusion wasn't logic, however, but impulse; he was a young fellow of strong enough character, but I was aware, from what they had both let drop, that he had been an affectionate son and brother, and I threw into the balance the many influences which might naturally be counted as being brought to work upon him.

"As I say, that conclusion struck me instantly. And the heart-rending part of it was this: the little deserted wife divined exactly what was passing through my head.

"'Oh, not *that!*' she cried. 'You are mistaken!' Then, abashed and conscience-stricken at having bared her mind, she corrected herself, 'I mean something must have happened to my husband—some accident——'

"It was painful, sir, to see that little woman beating about for a plausible excuse. I saw I'd hurt her feelings, and tried to make it better by saying: 'I sincerely hope nothing has happened to your husband, Mrs. Miller. Upon the whole I think it's very unlikely—that is, anything serious. Have you made inquiries of the authorities?—but wait,' I interrupted myself when I saw her lips begin to quiver—'of course, it's too soon to think of that; he's doubtless merely been delayed somewhere.'

"And then I went on to give her what comfort I could, which was, of course, none at all.

"I went myself, just as soon as she was gone, to police headquarters, and had word sent to the hospitals and to the station-houses; but at none of them had he been heard of.

"In a day or two I put advertisements in the papers, calling upon him by his initials, and also left his description with detectives; the result was the same.

"I congratulated myself lugubriously on my intuition; he had certainly been bribed to go home. With even as little as I then knew of him, I had been trying to persuade myself that the going was merely the opening wedge of a general reconciliation; but that seemed now a false hope.

"As I have said, I doubt whether Miller is his right name. Had I known it, it would have been easy, or at least easier, to trace him. His wife knew, of course, because they were married in his right name, and merely assumed the other to avoid any pursuit by his family; but I believe she'd have stood the rack sooner than appeal to him, or to his people, deserted as she was.

"Well, at the end of a week, Mrs. Miller came in again. I had seen her at intervals since her husband's disappearance, and always she had appeared hopeful, even confident. I say appeared; what she really thought, of course, I don't know, but I honestly believe she never for an instant doubted him. I believe that truly, incomprehensible as it may seem in the light of the probabilities of the case.

"Well, Mrs. Miller came in, her face all rosy and the big blue eyes brilliant.

"'My husband!' she panted, before I could get out a word.

"'Yes, Mrs. Miller,' I said.

"'He is safe!'

"'I am very glad to hear it!' I said heartily. 'Where——'

"'I thought I'd come and tell you,' she interrupted, blushing and diffident; 'you've been so kind.'

"It seems that he had been attacked by some ruffians, who may have thought that he had some of the firm's money on him. He was found unconscious, and taken to a hospital, where he remained for a week before he really recovered full consciousness. In his semi-lucid intervals, they had not been able to get anything out of him.

"How was it that my inquiries led to nothing? Goodness knows! That is one of those things which cannot be explained.

"That was nearly three months ago. He lost his situation and they are nearly starving, for he has only picked up odd jobs.

"On Monday I had a letter from him. He is after a place with a good salary in the office of an engineering company. I am sure he could fill the post well, but he has no influence, and you know how those things go.

"And that's what I came for—to see if I couldn't help him. Marsden, I believe you're a director of that very company. I want the use of your name." Vickery pulled out his watch, and added: "It's getting late. I'm going round to see them, and haven't time to talk now. But to-morrow, if you don't mind——"

Marsden leant forward to look out of the window.

"H'm; beautiful night, isn't it?" he remarked. "Seems cooler out, too. Er—suppose I walk over with you? Like a business man, I'm cautious. If I'm to do anything for these people you've been talking about——"

"With all my heart," answered Vickery. "I'd like you to see them, and talk with them. We'll have a hansom. Besides, you look rather knocked up. My story—eh? No, but seriously, you ought to get out of town; this weather's enough to kill a man."

The cab took them to the East end. They alighted in a very poor neighbourhood, in front of a dilapidated house.

Vickery led the way through the open door, and up a steep flight of stairs. The younger man stopped before a door and knocked.

"I think this is the place," he said.

It was a minute before the door opened; and then a woman with a baby in her arms stood before him. Her cheeks grew rosy, her eyes kindled.

"Oh, Mr. Vickery!" she cried, "Henry's got the place! He——"

She broke off abruptly and reddened even more when she saw the other man behind.

Marsden brushed past his friend and the young woman. In a corner he had seen a rough couch, and upon it, hollow-cheeked and feverish-eyed, a youth. He crossed the room rapidly and sank to his knees beside it. There were some incoherent cries.

The young woman looked upon the scene for an instant, then turned her blue eyes wonderingly upon Vickery. The infant in her arms, with eyes just as blue and infinitely more wondering, looked at him also.

For a moment there was neither sound or movement in the room. Then the child, frightened doubtless at the foolish blankness of Vickery's face, began to cry.

In another moment Marsden had risen and come back to the door. He put out his hand to the woman. Then he turned to confront his astonished companion, who had become rooted to the spot.

Marsden mopped his forehead savagely with his handkerchief; then, with two wet lines down his plump cheeks, he tried to speak. An instant his lips moved mutely; but at last he blubbered:

"Oh, bother it, man! Can't you—can't you see you were telling me *my* story?"

Silas Green.

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THE TOUR OF THE FOUR.

It was Saturday afternoon, and I was on my way, in an omnibus, to make a long-delayed call upon a distant aunt—no favourite of mine—who, I knew, must be pining for my society. I had taken the only vacant seat, opposite a very pretty girl who held a huge box in her lap, while another occupied the space beside her.

She had cast a quick glance at me when I entered, as if she thought she knew me, and, indeed, there was something familiar about her own face; but I was at a loss to recall it.

She was a well-dressed girl, and the enormous cardboard boxes did not at all harmonise with her neat costume. Of this she tried to appear serenely unconscious, as well as of the fact that everyone was looking at her, and she really did it very well.

The boxes were tied and knotted carefully in every direction with stout twine; moreover, the covers and the sides were punched full of good-sized holes, and at last it dawned upon my slow comprehension that there must be something alive inside.

Hardly had I reached this astute decision, when a prolonged and mournful *meaou* from the box beside her betrayed its correctness. The passengers began to smile broadly, and the girl's cheeks flushed, but her lips twitched on the verge of laughter as she bent over the box and appeared to whisper words of comfort through the cover.

We had reached the suburbs and were jolting along not far from my destination, when the 'bus stopped to admit a lady, for whom the girl hastened to make room by hastily lifting the heavy box beside her on to the other in her lap. The box slipped, came down with a dull thud, and a sound of rending cardboard. There was a sudden frantic *meaou*, and through the side of the lower box was thrust a black head with bulging yellow eyes.

The sudden movement of its prison cell had also greatly disturbed the occupant of the upper box, and with wild kickings and scratchings a corner of the cover was unexpectedly loosened, and another head protruded.

With a little ejaculation of horror, the girl clapped a hand over each furry head, and tried to force them back. Several of us sprang at once to her assistance, with imminent danger of choking both cats, but among us all we succeeded only in increasing their struggles, to the further collapse of the boxes.

At that moment the girl, looking up wildly, cried:

"Oh! stop, conductor, please! I want to get out here."

Raising my hat, I begged her to allow me to assist, and forthwith seized one cat by the neck, entangled in a chaos of string and smashed cardboard, and followed her, she grasping the other beast in a like condition.

She thought I meant merely to help her off the omnibus, and looked surprised when I allowed the vehicle to go on and stated my intention of helping her to carry the cats to her destination.

She opened her lips as if to speak. She looked at me doubtfully, then at the struggling cats, which we each held at arm's length, and saw the folly of refusing my offer.

"I was taking them to the Home," she volunteered simply.

"I beg your pardon," I queried in stupid perplexity, "*the Home?*"

"Yes, the Home for Stray Cats; it is somewhere near here—close by the Common. These are both stray cats. I had to take them in, but I couldn't keep them, poor things—I have three already," she went on to explain with sweet compassion.

"I should say not," I assented fervently, as the grey villain I held began to struggle and scratch afresh in frantic efforts to regain his straydom.

She looked reproachful. We walked on in silence for a few yards. Then she spoke again:

"This is very unconventional," she began hesitatingly, "and I don't know that I ought to let you help me, Mr.—ah——"

"Smith," I prompted her.

She raised her eyebrows and looked at me queerly, and I saw that she believed it to be an *alias*, which frightened her.

"But there is nothing else for you to do," I assured her earnestly. "It may be unconventional, but it's common sense."

I tried to look affectionately at the cats.

"Do you know where this Home is, Miss—er—er——"

She hesitated a moment, then her eyes twinkled.

"Miss Jones," she said.

I saw at once that she had not given me her real name, though I had been more frank.

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She had launched into a vivid and enthusiastic description of the charitable refuge, and I was growing quite interested in it, when, with a mighty effort, the black cat which she was carrying kicked himself free of her arm, and was off like an inky streak.

"Oh, catch him!" she cried, turning piteously to me; "do catch him, Mr. Smith!"

Her tone was not to be resisted, and another moment saw me in the chase. The other cat, which I held under my arm, grew frantic at my pace, and struggled madly with my ill-protected flesh; but I heeded not.

Such a chase! Down the street, over the Common, did I pursue the wretched creature. I might be chasing him to this day but for the tangled mess of string and cardboard which he dragged after him, and which at last caught in a bush in a private garden.

I grasped him by the scruff of his neck, and breathed in his tattered ear some words not calculated to soothe his wounded spirits; then, with a beast under each arm, I strode triumphantly back to meet Miss Jones, who was hurrying towards me.

"Oh, you are so kind!" she faltered, as I came up. "How can I ever thank you? Here is your hat; I picked it up in the street."

I told her, of course, that I was sufficiently thanked already, as I sat on the step of a house recovering my breath, while she bent over me, trying to disentangle the graceless cats from their harnesses, and from one another, and from me.

The spirit of our adventure was fast sweeping away the barrier of conventional restraint, and she laughed aloud at the spectacle which I presented, and I know it must have been an unusually picturesque one, sitting there breathless and hatless.

"Patience on a monument," she laughed.

"If you will represent Grief, I think I can feel it worth while to smile at her," I remarked, with a feeble attempt to illustrate my words.

"Oh, don't smile," she hastened to add. "It was so much funnier before when you glared so tragically at the poor cats, Jer— Mr. Smith."

I almost thought she was going to say something else. But how could she know my name was Jerome? It must have been imagination. And yet again I caught that half-familiar look, which once more set me to puzzling my brain in vain.

We again took up our line of march, Miss Jones gathering up the black cat in both arms, and I holding the grey one less tenderly but quite as firmly. Thus we proceeded for nearly half a mile, till we came to a quaint little lonely structure, which from certain sounds we judged to be the Home.

Imagine our dismay on seeing this notice:

"Closed to visitors on Saturdays and Sundays. No animals received after 2 p.m. on Saturday."

"What shall I do?" asked Miss Jones in despair.

I looked at Miss Jones; I looked at her cat, and at mine; I looked about me, and suggested turning them loose. But she would not entertain the proposal.

"But—why, you must have some engagement," she said, as if this possibility had just occurred to her. "I must not bother you any longer—er—Mr. Smith. You have been so awfully kind already."

Her gratitude was charming; she had beautiful brown eyes. I assured her that I had no engagement. Aunt Rosa never knew how near she came to the great happiness of my company.

"But," I went on, "you simply can't carry both those cats," and Malkin gave a howl of anguish.

"Oh, yes, I could!" she replied, but somewhat doubtfully, as Tom voiced a contradictory sentiment.

"No," I said firmly, "as you won't desert the cats, Miss Jones, so I will never desert you until you have disposed of them to suit yourself."

It was a rash promise, but I was now thoroughly interested in the game. Even playing knight-errant to homeless cats (and a pretty girl) was better than an afternoon with Aunt Rosa.

She decided that we should try to dispose of them to some inhabitants of the place. She went on one side of the street and I on the other. I draw a veil over what passed. When we had at length succeeded in disposing of the brutes we were tired and hungry.

"I think they will really be happier than they would have been in the Home, don't you?" she asked.

"Yes, doubtless it is better—for the *cats*," I replied significantly.

"They were very nice cats," she retorted.

"I have nothing against them," I answered promptly. "On the contrary, I owe them a very interesting and thrilling afternoon, and a most pleasant acquaintance with—Miss Jones."

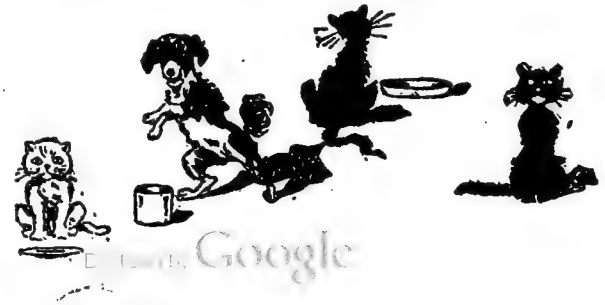
Her face changed immediately, and a return to conventional dignity took the place of her simple freedom.

"And now, when I have thanked you most heartily for your very great kindness, Mr. Smith," she said primly, "I will bid you good afternoon. I am going back on the next 'bus."

"So am I," I began boldly, but I stopped at the almost frightened look on her face.

"You—you mustn't," she said quickly. "We—we are strangers, you know, after all. I really—you know you promised as soon as the cats were disposed of—"

I argued in vain about this absurd convention of Society. She was firm, and I had to give in.



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"Very well," I said sadly. "I will leave you then; but really, Miss Jones, I must take this 'bus too, for I have to get back, and you know it is rather late."

She saw the implied reproach, for I had wasted a whole afternoon upon her cats.

"Well—then you must sit at the other end of the 'bus, or on top, please," she insisted. "I know I am doing only what is right to ask you this."

She was adorably confused and troubled, and so of course I had to agree to this also, absurd as it was. We formally said good-bye at the corner, and she thanked me very prettily again.

Then the 'bus came up, and as it was full outside, I went inside and took a seat at the other end. What an absurd situation!

When she alighted she did not even look my way.

For weeks I was haunted by the puzzling familiarity of Miss Jones's face. And yet—knowing that this was not her real name, I did not see how I could manage to meet her and gain an introduction. It was maddening, for I had never wanted anything so much in my life before as to renew our acquaintance.

I haunted the street into which I had seen her disappear, in the hope of learning her address even, but in vain.

I decided to write an exaggerated account of that excursion, and send it to the local paper of my native place.

One morning, three weeks later, I received a copy of the *Autocrat*. I scanned the pages eagerly for my story—for even my own history of that afternoon with "Miss Jones" seemed precious to me. I found the article and was pleased to see that they had illustrated it. But what—! How the deuce—! I looked at the first picture a second time. It was I myself, the very image, helping Miss Jones herself from the 'bus, with the two cats, as natural and ugly as life, between us. What did it mean?

I turned the pages. Yes—there was I, hatless and undignified—the artist was no flatterer—scouring wildly after the escaping cat, the other hanging under my arm. Here we sat on the step, liberating the cats; here, two weary pilgrims, we stood in despair outside the Home; here was I, hawking a cat from door to door, and lastly, our dignified return at opposite corners of the 'bus.

The whole story was told in a series of most clever pictures—it needed no words by Jerome Smith to complete the tale. It was all there. And the artist?

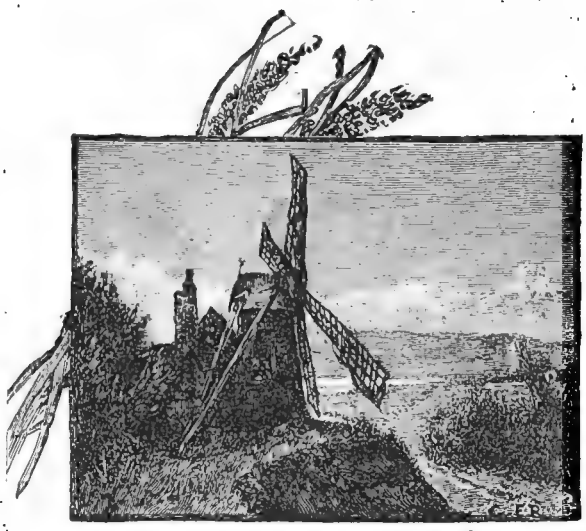
There was only one eye-witness who could have caught those sketches. I searched for the name eagerly, and at last I found it in a corner of one picture: "W. Irene Jones."

Her name was Jones then, after all. Hurrah! Now I could find her address from the publishers. Then a thought struck me: Why had she also favoured the *Autocrat*? "W. Irene Jones"—suddenly I understood it all—her familiar face, the smile that haunted me.

Why, I knew the girl! She was Winny Jones, of course, my little playmate of fifteen years ago, whom I had not seen since I left Shefton! My little Winny, whom as a boy of twelve I had carried pickaback, and teased and kissed and romped with, a baby of five. And now I thought of it, I remembered that when I was in Shefton last they had said she had come to London to study art.

I lost no time, you may be sure, in learning Winny's address. Two days later I called upon her.

She entered the room with flushed cheeks and her eyes laughing to match the corners of her pretty mouth. She held my card in her hand.



"So it was your real name after all," she said, as she stretched out her hand cordially. "I thought——"

"So did I," I interrupted eagerly.

"I thought," she went on, "that it might be a false name, but I was almost sure it was really you. For you see I remembered you, though it is so long."

"But why didn't you say so, then?" I asked half impatiently.

She pouted:

"Why—you didn't recognise me, and I was provoked. I wasn't going to be the only one to remember."

"But a girl changes so much more than a man in ten years," I apologised. "You were only a little girl when I left, and even your name is different now. I used to call you 'Winny.'"

"And I almost called you 'Jerry' lots of times that afternoon, just as I used to," she laughed. "But I tried to be very dignified, so that you shouldn't guess."

And so we chatted happily about the events of that wonderful day, and she told me how she had sent the sketches to the *Autocrat* as a joke on me, not thinking that I had sent a story.

"I was sure you would see them," she said.

"And call?" I boldly hinted.

But she indignantly scorned the imputation, and we almost quarrelled. Then I asked what she thought of the ending of my story.

She flushed a delicious rosy pink.

"It was impossible—an altogether far-fetched and improbable ending," she declared emphatically.

"Oh, no, I don't think so." I rejoined. "I think it very natural and just what the story needed to make it end well. Don't you like stories to end well?"

We argued the matter for some time from a literary standpoint, and later we touched upon it from other standpoints. And in the end I succeeded in convincing her.

So it happened that our adventure finally did "end well" after all. And I hope each of those cats has as happy a home as I now enjoy. DOWNE PATRICK.

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LOVE'S DECEPTION.

Mr. Thomas Ward was a client of our firm for about thirty years. He had two daughters, Maud and Helen; they were twins, and as like as two peas.

I know that many a joke has been made about the resemblance of twins, but in this case it was an absolute fact that friends and relatives couldn't tell one from the other. And the striking similarity of form and features remained as they grew up—which is not always the case. The girls themselves, full of fun, took a delight in the general mystification, and purposely dressed alike in every detail.

Howard Britten paid particular attention to Maud, and after the first few weeks, as the matter began to assume a serious aspect, Helen ceased to pretend that she was Maud. But Britten himself admitted that, even when he thought he could well distinguish the one from the other, he occasionally made a mistake.

When Ward saw that it really was serious, he made inquiries about Britten, and finding that he was not possessed of a fair quantity of this world's goods, put his foot down, and said that Britten should not have her unless he could "give a better account of himself."

I pass over the tears and expostulations. Ward was firm, and Britten proud; the upshot of it was that the young man went to South Africa, and correspondence between the two was forbidden.

Luck was against the young man at first, and he toiled on for months without getting any nearer the goal. Once or twice he was tempted to send a few lines to his sweetheart, but he scorned to break the condition imposed by Ward.

After many months luck favoured Howard; in a short time after the change of fortune he felt that he had enough for his purpose. With his suddenly acquired wealth he could return to the old country, and purchase a share in a business, or do something else that would please Mr. Ward and gain his consent.

He sat down to write to Maud; but after having written a few lines, he tore up the paper. He would be his own messenger. How sweet the meeting would be! No one knew the depth of his love for her!

He sent word to his relatives in Ireland that he was coming home, but that he had first to go to London on an important matter. On arriving in London, he lost no time in making his way to the home of his sweetheart. A disappointment awaited him; the family had removed to a country house in Surrey. He obtained the address, and went off.

As soon as he came within sight of Heath Lodge, he recognised an old man-servant, who was doing something outside the house.

"Is Miss Maud in?" Howard asked the old man. "Did you hear what I said?" he added impatiently, as the man looked at him with a peculiar expression, but made no reply. "You know me, don't you?"

"Yes, sir," replied the man at length, slowly. "You'll find the mistress in the garden."

In his haste Howard forgot the old man's behaviour. In the distance, on a garden seat, he saw a form that he knew well. She had her back to him, and he crept along quietly, rejoicing in the glad surprise he was preparing for his beloved Maud. He reached the seat, and called her gently by name.

The girl started up with a cry and faced him. Before she could utter a word he was by her side and had folded her in a loving embrace, while he kissed her passionately.

"Maud, my darling, home again to claim you!"

At first the girl made a feeble effort to disengage herself, but giving way to an impulse, returned his kisses.

The rapture of the meeting over, they went into the house to find Mr. Ward. She left him in the drawing-room while she sought her father. She was gone so long that he began to get impatient, but at length the old gentleman appeared and welcomed him effusively. A few minutes later Howard asked after Helen, and learnt the sad news that she had died of fever twelve months previously. That was really the cause of their removal.

Six weeks after his arrival in London Howard was married to his sweetheart, and took her to a new home in Ireland, near his own people. It was Mr. Ward's express desire; he intended to sell Heath Lodge and live near them.

Mr. and Mrs. Britten were the happiest of married couples. His wife simply idolised him, and he was devotion itself to her. People who heard of the story of their courtship—if we may so term it—said that it was but just that two young people who loved each other so much should be mated, and they were inclined to blame Ward for his share in the affair. "But," said the neighbours among themselves, "would it not have been terrible had Maud died instead of Helen!"

The same thought occurred to Howard, and he expressed it to his wife; but she went so pale, and trembled so, that he reproached himself for having mentioned it and never referred to the subject again.

Their married life lasted several years; then Howard, still young, met with an accident that proved fatal in less than two days. In the one interval of consciousness—immediately before his death—he blessed his wife for her faithfulness in their hour of trial and for her great love and devotion to him during the years that they had been man and wife.

And the secret of her life remained untold! That secret was known only to her father and the old gardener; it came into my possession later, and there is no harm in telling it now.

Helen Ward had loved Howard Britten with that love which comes only once to a woman, but when she saw that he preferred Maud, she stood aside in favour of her sister. After Howard's departure, Maud's affection for him declined, and she said that she would tell him so if she knew his address. It was she who had been attacked by fever and had succumbed.

When Howard had surprised Helen in the garden, all her love for him was intensified, and yielding to the impulse of her heart, she conceived a plan that would spare him lifelong grief, give him the happiness to which he had looked forward, and enable her, Helen, to wed the man she loved. She won her father over to her side before she took him into the drawing-room, the gardener was bribed, and the removal to Ireland completed the execution of the plan.

Deception is never right? Well, strictly speaking, that is correct; but there are exceptional circumstances, and in Helen's case—as I always shall insist—it was not merely pardonable, it was praiseworthy.

G. D.

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DO STOUT PEOPLE LIVE LONG?

This is a question which has occupied the attention of medical authorities from time immemorial. Some argue that the lean kind take longer to shuffle off the mortal coil than their stout brethren. The statistics naturally favour this argument, and no doubt are correct to a great extent, because sufferers from obesity are more susceptible to disease in consequence of the debilitated state of the system when clogged with abnormal adipose tissue; but a curious fact has been overlooked, viz., that corpulence generally commences about the age of thirty-five to fifty, after which time it seems to decrease; therefore, before the proverbial "three score and ten" is reached, the whilom fat man is, by a natural process, again reduced to what may only be called moderate plumpness, and thus cheats the statistician. Stout persons can now, thanks to science, reduce their weight in a most extraordinary rapid manner, without the slightest injury to their constitutions, or without resorting to those drastic remedies which only operate for a time, or by the continuance of the use of toxical drugs extending over such a period that renders it baneful to the long-suffering patient. An eminent Continental therapeutist recommends the victim to obesity to eat fat meat, while an equally eminent American prescribes lean ditto, and the stomach is to risk an accumulation of serious disorders by swallowing a pint of hot water daily, a most nauseous remedy we should think, and not unattended with danger. The past master in the cure of corpulence is Mr. F. C. Russell, of Woburn House, Store Street, London, W.C., whose book (256 pages), entitled "Corpulency, and the Cure," price only two penny stamps, seems to impress us considerably, for he reduces more weight by his system than the Continental and American physicians, without any of the absurd restrictions which would make life scarcely worth living. He uses simple herbs, the properties of which he seems to possess a more than usual knowledge, and he makes but little secret of his method, so refreshing after the mystery made of most chemical and herbal concoctions for various complaints.—*Wetherby News.*

SUMMER HEAT AND OBESITY.

Summer heat, with the outdoor enjoyments which come in its train, is a source of unmixed delight to all whose physical condition is sound. The full feast of pleasure to which hospitable Nature at this season invites mankind is not, however, for those whose infirmities forbid them to undergo, without serious discomfort, a considerable amount of bodily fatigue. To those in particular who are the victims of excessive corpulence the arrival of the genial summer warmth serves chiefly as a painful reminder that, for them, the delights of long woodland rambles, the climbing of mountain tops, and all the adventurous ways of flood and field are prohibited joys. The palpitating heart, the reeling brain, and the possible deadly sunstroke, which are the concomitants of obesity, banish all the pleasant anticipations which once came with the advent of the glad summer-tide. How much of this deprivation of enjoyment and positive misery is absolutely and easily avoidable may be learned by consulting Mr. F. Cecil Russell's "Corpulency, and the Cure" (256 pages), a little work whose popularity is proved by the fact that its eighteenth edition has just been issued. This fact, too, indicates in some degree the wide area now covered by Mr. Russell's wonderful success as an expert in the reduction of excessive fat. His process, which is absolutely safe and pleasant, is so rapid in its operation that any over-corpulent lady or gentleman can easily get rid of all unnecessary weight in a very few weeks, so as to be able, before the autumn is with us, to enjoy the delightful feeling (and the appearance too) of renewed youth and energy. Mr. Russell makes no mystery of the nature of his curative preparation—apparently miraculous are its effects in simultaneously reducing weight and increasing appetite, the larger amount of food being consumed with impunity. He prints, therefore, his recipe in his singularly suggestive book, which may be obtained, post free, by sending two penny stamps to his offices, Woburn House, 27 Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C.—*Gloucester Standard.*

CORPULENCE. INCREASING POPULARITY OF AN EFFECTUAL CURE.

Extreme Obesity Becoming a Thing of the Past.

Many of our readers are, doubtless, familiar with the nature of the extraordinary revolution in the cure of obesity which, within recent years, has been wrought by the original researches of that now eminent expert, Mr. F. Cecil Russell, of Woburn House, Store St., Bedford Square, London, W.C. It is evident that the certainty, the rapidity, and the agreeable surroundings of his curative process have been recognised, in a very large degree, among ladies and gentlemen belonging to the highest social circles. Keen observers who have an opportunity of judging inform us, through the pages of Society papers and otherwise, that owing to the general employment of Mr. Russell's treatment, extreme obesity is becoming as much a thing of the past at fashionable gatherings as intoxication; and no doubt it will soon be regarded as nearly as disgraceful. The issue of an eighteenth edition of the author's singularly convincing little text book, "Corpulency, and the Cure," however, serves to remind us that the popularity of the system has now reached spheres far remote from those of West-end fashion. The book of 256 pages may be had post free, by sending two penny stamps to Mr. Russell's offices, as above; and it is worth the careful attention of those who wish to free themselves of a burden of fat—not merely because it is unseemly and adds enormously to the apparent age of the sufferer—but because extreme obesity terribly interferes with the energy necessary in these days of competition to make one's way in the world or even to earn a very modest competency. A large proportion of the letters of Mr. Russell's grateful correspondents refer to their delight at being enabled—within a very brief period, and without any irksome conditions implying semi-starvation—to attack their accustomed tasks with pleasure instead of wearied disgust, through being reduced to their normal weight. The popularity of the system is also largely due, doubtless, to the English hatred of mystery, which is utterly swept aside by Mr. Russell. He fully explains his *modus operandi*, and supplies the recipe for his preparation.—*Bicester Herald.*

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YOUR ESTEEMED INQUIRY DULY TO HAND.

Rain.—The East coast generally, from Grimsby to Southend, has a much lighter rainfall than the rest of the United Kingdom, and an extensive district to the south south-west of the Wash is the driest part of the Kingdom. The single place with the least rainfall appears to be East Linton, Haddingtonshire.

M. E. D.—It is very seldom that a tall or very stout person is admitted to a lunatic asylum, except insanity result from shock. As the mental condition improves, the weight increases.

Fare.—Railway travelling is cheapest in Norway and dearest in Turkey. In the latter country the fare is, on an average, three halfpence per mile for third-class, while in the former it is only one-third that sum.

Superstition.—The idea that peacocks' feathers are unlucky is based on the classical story of Osiris, King of Egypt. When he started on his Indian expedition, he left his Queen, Isis, as regent, with Argus as her chief adviser. Argus shut the Queen up in a strong castle and proclaimed himself King of Egypt. Mercury was sent against him with a large army, captured him and cut off his head; whereupon Juno turned him into a peacock and set his hundred eyes (spies) on his tail. The superstition has arisen from that legend and the additions that have been made to it from time to time.

M. E. would like to know which battle was called the "Battle of the Three Emperors."———Austerlitz, fought in December, 1805. It was called by the name you mention because the French were commanded by the Emperor Napoleon, and the Austrians and Russians by the Emperors Francis II. and Alexander I.

E. X.—The Spaniards put the notes of interrogation and admiration in front of the sentence or clause as well at the end. They say that it prepares the reader for the significance of what is coming, and enables him to give the proper tone to the words if reading aloud. The signs placed in front of the sentence are inverted.

No. 1.—Houses were not numbered in London till 1764. Lincoln is said to have anticipated the Metropolis in this respect; a row of houses facing the west front of the cathedral are called the "number houses" because they were the first in the city to be numbered.

S. K.—The weight of an average skeleton—that is, of a native of this country—is twenty-four pounds for the male, and eighteen pounds for the female.

Annie.—The daily use of curling tongs removes the natural oil from the hair and dries it, while crimping the hair with hot irons causes it to crack and break. That may not be of great importance in the case of young people, but in later years it induces baldness. In any case, it is not to be recommended.

Q.—It is estimated that about three-quarters of the land surface of the globe cannot be cultivated, because that proportion of the surface is covered by swamps, mountains, deserts, and the like.

Smoker is curious to know why meerschaum "colours."———Meerschaum would not colour at all but for the fact that it is boiled in wax. If used in its natural state it would become soiled very quickly, the material being so porous that it absorbs the slightest moisture from the hand or anything it comes in contact with. The wax, however, fills up the pores and gives it a sort of enamel.

Infant.—It often happens that strikingly clever children grow up mediocre or even stupid men and women. The human brain grows in two ways, size and weight, and structure and development. The very clever child is one in whom development is proceeding more rapidly than it should at the expense of the other form of growth. There is a given amount of energy bestowed by nature upon individuals, and if this is used up for development it is not available for growth in size and weight, which stops short. The child grows up lacking in the qualities of reasoning power, judgment, grasp of detail, and others which make the clever man.

Z. Z. writes: "What is meant by 'hunger stones'? I think they have some connection with a Continental country."———When the Rhine falls very low in the winter certain stones are exposed to view. The people assert that this is a sure indication that the ensuing year will be one of scarcity for them, so they call the stones by the name you mention. The date is sometimes cut upon them.

Flag.—All the flags, except the Royal Standards, required for the British warships are made in the Government dockyards. In the colour-loft of Chatham about 18,000 flags are made each year.

S. W.—Although a day is usually reckoned as being twenty-four hours in length, strictly speaking it is a mistake. The standard unit of time is the "sidereal day," which is 23 hours, 56 minutes and 4·091 seconds.

Jaw.—There are eight muscles in the human jaw, and in the ordinary man they exert a force of five hundred pounds.

Level.—The average height of the British Isles above the level of the sea is 714 feet. In many parts of the world the average altitude of the land is either rising or falling. Observations in connection with the most important peaks of the Cordilleras show that their height is gradually diminishing. Quito is 76 feet lower than it was a century and a quarter ago. On the other hand, the coast of Finland is being gradually elevated; during the last century islands have become peninsulas.

Tommy A.—The most murderous battle of modern times was that fought at Borodino, a Russian village, on September the 7th, 1812, between Napoleon and the Russians. The battle was one of the most obstinately disputed in modern history, and about 80,000 men were placed *hors de combat*. The fights before Plevna in 1877 were very sanguinary; the Russians had nearly 30,000 men killed or wounded in one battle.

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In all Prize Competitions the Editor's decision is final. No correspondence will be entertained when once a competition is finished and the result published.

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For less than 8 words, no prize.

WHAT TO DO.—When you have found what you think are the correct words, write them out on a sheet of paper, numbering the sentences 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, as set out above, then send same, together with a Postal Order for 1s. 6d. (not stamps), for a bottle of our famous Marking Ink, saying whether you want Red or Black, and a stamped addressed envelope for results to—

WOLFF & CO., 82 MILTON STREET, LONDON, E.C.

A little trouble will secure you a prize.

Write distinctly and fully your name and address, put name of this paper at top of your letter, and send in your order for the **Marking Ink** as soon as possible.

The competition will close on July 30th, 1898. The prizes will be awarded and results posted in the following week. The solution of this competition has been sealed and deposited with our solicitors, and will be opened at their offices on the appointed day.

In connection with this exceptional and Genuine Competition, we would particularly point out that competitors will receive not only full value for their P.O.'s in the shape of a bottle of **Wolff's Imperishable Egyptian Marking Ink**, but the bottle we supply for 1s. 6d., post free, contains three times the quantity usually sold by other makers for 1s., and is the largest bottle of **Marking Ink** in the Market for the price. We are willing to spend a considerable sum of money in advertising our Egyptian Marking Inks, and we prefer doing it this way to expending it on newspaper advertisements, etc. We ask all competitors who do not receive their Marking Ink in a few days not to jump to any hasty conclusions. Parcels sometimes get lost in the post, in which case we will willingly replace same if you will communicate with us, giving number of your P.O.

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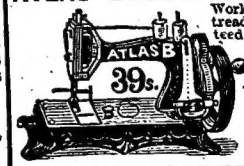

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